

Page 10 NGO pushes fair trade

Activists are hoping to teach buyers that when trade is fair and purchases ethical, everyone wins.



Pages 20-21 Ancient pageant

Mentougou's century-old holiday gathering finds new fans this year.

Pebbles in ink



Traveling from Italy to China to gather stones was only the first part of Barbara Anchisi's art project.

The works in her new exhibition set the pebbles against the nations' colors on Chinese paper. Her work bridges traditions to show how East and West can fit together.

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Conferences to draw cash, not brains

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Youth shrink may end online games

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'Healthy' food choices can hurt you

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Courts warn 'fake divorces' dangerous plan for property shoppers

By Han Manman

The municipal government is pledging to crack down on local residents who are seeking temporary divorces to buy extra property with impunity after passing a new series of measures to restrict home purchases in the city.

The Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development pledged to cooperate with the bureaus of public security, taxation, civil affairs and social welfare to weed out potential homeowners out to abuse the system, the Legal Mirror reported Tuesday.

The departments will share information about buyers and those who provide false informa-

tion will be denied their permit to purchase property. Violators will also be given a black mark on their credit record.

According to the report, officials at the Beijing Civil Affairs Bureau will also solicit additional information from couples seeking a divorce.

To contain soaring real estate prices, Beijing adopted new housing regulations last Thursday which seek to limit who can purchase homes. Under the new regulations, non-residents must now provide records showing that they have paid into the city's tax and social security system for at least five years. Beijing residents are allowed to purchase no

more than two homes.

To circumvent the new regulations, some investors have used loopholes in the marriage and divorce laws.

Xu Jiwei, a local resident, said his residency certificate could make him a quick 400,000 to 600,000 yuan in commission by marrying and divorcing non-resident real estate buyers four to six times each year.

"I can divorce my wife, who is also a Beijing hukou holder, and then we will each marry a non-Beijinger," Xu said. "Suppose we each make 100,000 to 150,000 yuan by helping our non-local spouses buy homes. Then imagine if we divorce and remarry six

times per year."

"Some lawyers have already said this business can work," Xu said.

Chen Changyi, a representative of the Haidian District Court, said the false marriages could result in other legal disputes rather than a win-win happy ending.

Chen said that in one case, a couple divorced to buy a third home. When his wife refused to remarry him, he ended up without her and without a home.

Numerous cities across the country have announced measures intended to curb the housing bubble starting with a property tax on January 28.

In Shanghai, local housing

authorities said last Saturday that new rules forbid home purchases by local families who own two or more homes and by non-local families who own at least one home.

Property is also off limits to non-Shanghai residents who have not paid at least one year's worth of social security and income tax to the city.

Similar restrictions were rolled out by authorities in Nanjing and Harbin.

Industry insiders said these measures will help contain housing prices, which have continued to go up in most cities despite a slew of tightening measures put in place last year.

Top universities team up for joint entrance exams

Students looking to enter some of the country's most prestigious universities began sitting independent college entrance exams last weekend, three months before the national exam.

Saturday and Sunday saw two joint independent exams for the two leagues represented by Tsinghua University and Peking University.

Next Saturday, another alliance of nine universities, composed of Shanghai-based Tongji University and institutes of technology in Beijing, Harbin, Dalian, Guangzhou and Xi'an, will also conduct a joint entrance exam.

These three groups, representing 29 universities, will use their own criteria to select 5 percent of their students in place of the national exam.

It's an important step in the reform of the college entrance exam system, said Lao Kaisheng, an expert on education policy at Capital Normal University.

Students who want to enter any of the seven universities in the Tsinghua league, or any of the 13 universities in the Peking league, only needed to sit one independent exam.

"This helps lighten the students' load, otherwise they would have to take exams for all the different universities," Lao said.

Passing the exam could result in more than one interview, giving the students more opportunities to get into their most preferred universities, he said.

But all candidates still had to take the national college entrance exam in June, which would finally determine their success. Examinees could benefit from being awarded certain marks according to their scores in the independent tests.

For decades, the national college entrance exam was the



60,000 students attended the Tsinghua alliance's exams last weekend. CFP Photo

only test for high school graduates planning to continue on to higher education.

The joint independent recruitment exams are regarded as the latest attempts to improve the nation's widely criticized college recruitment system.

"The independent exam focuses more on testing students' creativity, imagination and learning skills, and is tougher than the national exam," said Yu Han, director of admissions at Tsinghua University.

The test results would not only show the scores, but also give students a report on their strengths and weaknesses in different subjects, Yu said.

The summary is intended to help students improve their weak points and to recruit students likely to excel in specific subjects, Yu said.

The Tsinghua alliance, which was formed last year, includes Tsinghua University, University of Science and Technology of China, Shanghai Jiaotong University, Xi'an Jiaotong

University, Nanjing University, Renmin University of China and Zhejiang University.

Peking University, Beihang University, Beijing Normal University, Nankai University, Fudan University, Xiamen University and Hong Kong University agreed to form another alliance last year.

In 2003, Peking University and another 21 universities were allowed to pilot the reform by using their own criteria to independently select 5 percent of their students. Today, as many as 80 universities across the country have the right to select talented students based on their own exams.

To take pressure off students, the national education outline (2010-2020) released in July last year encourages high-level universities to group together to minimize the number of required exams.

Education experts say the new process will help educators better understand where their potential pupils' talents lie.

(Xinhua)

Pediatrician shortage leaves sick kids stuck with home care

By Han Manman

After 12 years of insufficient training, China is short some 200,000 pediatricians. The *Beijing Times* reported that for every 200 hospitals, only one specializes in pediatric care.

The shortage of pediatricians has scared many parents into self-medicating their children instead of going to a hospital – a recipe for disaster. Only days ago, the common children's fever medicine Nimesulide was found to be responsible for thousands of adverse reactions and several deaths.

Statistics published by *Beijing Times* showed that the US had three pediatricians for every 2,000 children compared to one for every 4,000 children in China.

The deficiency will hardly be corrected within the next decade, experts warn.

"Even if we halve the target, we will have to bridge the gap by training 10,000 pediatricians every year in the coming decade," said Zhu Zonghan, chairman of China Pediatric Association.

The gap exists for a reason: Zhu said the pediatric department earns less than other medical departments.

"Almost all adults have medical insurance, but most children don't. Their medical costs are paid by their parents. In the pediatric department at general hospitals, doctors' salaries are lower compared to those of other doctors. This department doesn't have good financial support," he said.

Zhu said Chinese universities

stopped offering pediatrics as an undergraduate major in 1999, which cut off a stable source of medics for the specialist field. The specialization remains unpopular even among postgraduates.

The country has only 60 pediatric hospitals capable of training new doctors at present, but the current patient load has devastated their training capacity, Zhu said.

Despite the limited availability of pediatric care, the Ministry of Health has made no plans goals to develop the field and attract more doctors, Zhu said.

"Few of my classmates choose pediatrics because the pay is much higher in other departments," said Chu Chenyu, 22, a student studying medicine at Capital Medical University.

"Unless you were trained to be a pediatrician from the moment you enrolled in college, you will not have sufficient motivation to devote yourself to that career," she said.

"Another frustration is that children don't usually know how to express their symptoms, and the rate of misdiagnosis is very high. Even experienced pediatricians risk numerous lawsuits," she said.

Zhu urged that pediatrics be restored as an undergraduate major as soon as possible.

He called on the central government to add pediatric health services to the country's 12th Five-Year Plan and to establish more children's hospitals across the nation.



Experts warn the shortage of pediatricians will take more than a decade to correct. CFP Photo

Alibaba's ousting of CEO may make it a role model

By Chu Meng

After a two-month self probe, e-commerce giant Alibaba has forced out its Chief Executive Officer Wei Zhe and Chief Operating Officer Li Xuhui after finding that 1,107 suppliers defrauded their online customers in 2010, the company said Monday via its website.

"Alibaba is not to become a money machine, and any behavior that runs against the company's values will not be tolerated," the statement said.

"The lesson was bitter for Alibaba, a successful listed company still in its early stages. But this rebuke will make it a powerful role model for the millions of booming domestic enterprises who have long been eager to sell their integrity for fast cash," said Shui Pi, a senior financial analyst and former editor of the *Huaxia Times*.

Though the scandal cut off the company's most powerful leaders, the action has shown its ardent will to build a solid, respectable foundation before extending its operations further overseas, Shui said.

Though Alibaba's share price

dropped, its reputation escaped largely unscathed.

"Fraud and low integrity are common failings of Chinese enterprises. The situation is seen at its worst in the booming e-business market," Shui said. Online companies are intangible and thus fragile, coming and going quickly, he said.

"Integrity – in both its staff and trading platform – is one of the foundational values that Alibaba cherishes most," said founder and non-executive chairman Ma Yun in an open letter to his employees Monday on his personal blog.

The investigation found that 1,219 suppliers in 2009 and 1,107 suppliers in 2010 – 1.1 and 0.8 percent of the total suppliers respectively, had acted fraudulently.

The statement said as many as 100 sales representatives who allegedly collaborated with or failed to properly assess the defrauding suppliers were fired or penalized.

The remaining 2,326 fraudulent suppliers offered popular consumer electronics at very low prices on the site, required small minimum order quantities and traded



Ma Yun (left), chairman of Alibaba, pledged to revise the company's checks to prevent similar incident. IC Photo

by less reliable payment methods. The average payment by buyers was less than \$1,200 (7,900 yuan), the company said.

"Tolerating such behavior is an inexcusable violation of the company's core values and a crime against honest suppliers and employees," Ma said.

Ma likened the scandal to growing pains and pledged to revise the company's checks to prevent similar incidents.

Lu Zhaoxi, 41, the current CEO of Alibaba group's subsidiary Taobao.com, has been selected to take over as CEO of Alibaba.com.

Apple's reputation plummets due to poisoned workers

By Han Manman

Discussion of Apple this week has focused not on its fashionable tech products but on its failure to address the grievances of workers at its supplier plant in Suzhou.

The factory is operated by Wintek, a Taiwanese firm contracted to produce iPhone components. To date, 137 of its workers have reported health problems stemming from their exposure to n-hexane, an alcohol substitute used to clean components such as the iPhone's touch screen.

Apple acknowledged the scandal on February 15 in its Apple Supplier Responsibility 2011 Progress Report. The company said 137 workers at the Suzhou factory had suffered adverse health effects due to the chemical.

Wintek said it used n-hexane, which evaporates faster than alcohol, between May 2008 and August 2009 to speed up production of Apple's touch screens. It has since resumed using alcohol.

The poisoning has put pressure on Apple to supervise its suppliers and take responsibly by helping the workers.

Apple said it had asked the supplier to discontinue n-hexane use and to repair its ventilation system. Apple said it would audit the factory later this year to ensure it is complying with Apple's standards.

As of Wednesday, 91 of the 137 have been paid compensation between 80,000 and 140,000 yuan. However, some workers are suffering relapses with cramping and excessive sweating, and the number of ill workers is continuing to rise.

Some workers had not fully recovered when they were discharged from the hos-

pital, and said Apple ignored their requests for better care.

"We have three things to ask of Apple," said Jia Jingchuan, a 27-year-old production technician for Wintek who is still ill.

"One is to give us a formal written apology. The second is to work with the supplier to have an independent hospital give us a follow-up medical examination and proper treatment. The third is fair compensation, since our lives and careers may be affected by this poisoning," Jia said.

Apple has not responded to the workers' requests as of press time.

Many international corporations, as standard procedure, require a third-party audit of their suppliers for purposes of quality control and worker safety. Suppliers are often found to lack the capacity, skills and incentives to improve working conditions and protect the environment, said Ma Jun, director of the Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs (IPE).

Last month, IPE and other environmental groups released a report criticising Apple for not being transparent enough about its suppliers.

"I think Apple should openly review all of these problems and try to resolve the potential risks," he said.

Legal responsibility in cases like this falls on the local supplier, not the international company contracted for the work, said Wang Canfa, a professor at China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing.

"It's more of an issue of corporate social responsibility than legal responsibility for multinational corporations," Wang said.

White House 'internship' for China students anything but work

By Liang Meilan

News that the White House has broken tradition to recruit Chinese students as interns has been confirmed false after a flurry of commentaries this week.

The news made the front page of the *Chongqing Morning Post* earlier this week, and on Tuesday the "internship" organizers, Chongqing's Rongchuang real estate company and the American Harvest Foundation, held a press conference to clarify their program.

American Harvest Foundation, which helps send students in Asia to study in the US, was initially reported as having said 10 outstanding Chongqing students would be selected to intern for one month at the White House during summer vacation.

Following the initial press, the hotline rang constantly on Tuesday with people requesting information on the fees, schedules and requirements, Xiao Lei, the program's admissions officer, said.

The trigger for the media blitz was the phrase "White House intern": the most sought-after work opportunity for most US students.

But the "internship program" being advertised was really just a cultural exchange organized by the White House to give participants a chance to practice English and get involved in political projects – a far cry from the rigorous official internship offered only to US citizens.

Barry Lu, the program's organizer and a consultant with the American Harvest Foundation, said in an interview with Ding Fei, editor of China National Radio, that the news that this was an internship was based on a statement misinterpreted by the Chongqing reporter.

"Unlike the official White House internship program, which lasts nine weeks, Chinese students will be allowed to stay in Washington DC only two weeks for a visit to President Obama's office," he said.

Lu said the foundation plans to negotiate with the White House to ask senior US officials to meet with the students and allow them to participate in common, non-sensitive administrative meetings in the US Capitol.

Recruitment is ongoing. When *Beijing Today* called the hotline to ask for details on Wednesday, the operator said the program would provide selected students with an opportunity similar to the White House internship. Students would be required to pay 200,000 yuan.

Xiong Bingqi, an education commentator on QQ.com, questioned whether the misinformation was an attempt to sensationalize the report or a simple misreading by the original reporter.

"Either possibility would touch on some of today's social problems," he said.

Much like the Chinese students who go to foreign diploma mills to pad their resume, Xiong said the internship program could be a way to pad their experience.



Lawyers said Apple's poisoning scandal is more a social problem than a legal one. IC Photo

International conferences a shill for profiteering organizers

By Li Zhixin

The international conference industry is booming as the country rises in economic power and international influence. China's top-tier cities have been playing host to a rapidly growing stream of big conferences.

But experts say the majority of these events are unnecessary, have no practical significance and only sully China's image as a serious site of academic discourse.



Many conferences are international only in name. Xiao Ming/CFP



Few international forums draw foreign faces.

Fang Xinwu/CFP

Fine start, poor finish

Employees at the Taihu Forum for Culture (TFC), a Suzhou-based cultural organization specializing in international conferences, have their hands full trying to salvage their long-prepared conference.

The organization was established in 2007 to prepare an international conference that would draw people to Suzhou, Jiangsu Province. It invited numerous foreign dignitaries like former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Germany's previous Chancellor Gerhard Schroder, former French Prime Minister Jean Pierre Raffarin, Australia's former Prime Minister Rudd Kevin and Singapore's former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

It also remembered to invite a few scholars.

The four-day conference was scheduled to open at the end of November 2010, but its schedule fell apart due to unprofessional operations and poor planning.

The organizing committee planned to bring together 2,000 guests, half of them foreigners, for the meeting. "It was really an impractical goal," said Zhang Xiaoli, an employee who has been working in the Forum's Beijing office since it was established.

Worse still, the headquarters decided to postpone the meeting several weeks before the opening because the organizing committee failed to secure any top officials. Zhang and her col-

leagues were forced to write and send letters of apology to the foreign scholars who had already confirmed their attendance and booked air tickets.

The lost tickets were paid for by the forum. "But actually, that compensation came from the Jiangsu provincial government," she said.

Zhang said the weak management made her want to quit several times. "I stayed because I thought my involvement could win me a chance to communicate with those first-rate international scholars like Joseph Nye, who proposed the idea of soft power, and Francis Fukuyama, who is best known for his *The End of History*," she said.

Utilitarian value behind the industry is bold

The number of international conferences held in China has grown quickly.

Statistics from the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) show China had 153 large conferences in 2006, ranking 14th in the world; 83 in 2007, ranking 8th; and 249 in 2009, ranking 9th.

The success of several high-level international meetings like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), Fortune Forum, and Summer Davos Forum has won the country a reputation as an international convention center.

However, China has only 30 years of experience in organizing and managing conferences.

"Most international conferences

are more a name than a reality," said Zhang Wei, vice chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT). "Although the central government wants various international forums to be held in China to improve academic exchange ... most conferences are just tools for profit-seeking organizers."

Some forums initiated by academic institutions draw only one or two participants from abroad in spite of their "international" branding.

"One of the driving forces making international conferences popular is the academic interest behind the conference, as many research institutes and universities usually use oral presentations at the conference as a way to gauge their scholars' academic output," said

Yang Mian, a professor at Communication University of China.

Besides, rather than professional communication, some organizers only aim to earn money through lucrative sponsorships. "It's common in China for organizers to provide their guests with free gifts, souvenirs and even sightseeing as well as upgrading their accommodation levels to fawn on and impress their guests," he said.

In some cities, international forums are being abused to promote local tourism and attract foreign investors — mistakes that have thoroughly discredited the academic nature of several forums. "The organizers often try to attract a few senior officials, thinking they can help promote the city and forum brand," Zhang said.

"It doesn't work."

New rules to cool forum fever

On February 12, the State Council, Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a notice calling for the strict control of international conferences held on the mainland.

The notice states that international conferences must not be agreed on without prior approval by both central authorities and a ministry or province, and those that have "unclear effectiveness" should not be held at all.

Those that concern domestic matters must first be approved as domestic conferences. The scale of conferences is required to be limited to no more than 100 participants. Organizers are also prohibited from

advertising the participation of state and Party leaders.

Budgets must be approved in advance, and "no free services may be offered" beyond the conference program. In particular, there should be no gifts, souvenirs or sightseeing. The level of accommodations should also be "strictly controlled."

"The new regulation seems like it was a roadblock custom made just for us," Zhang Xiaoli said. "Our forum will probably end up a stillborn due to the new regulation."

"The release of the regulation caught our leaders by surprise. They are having a hard time finding a timely solution," she said.

Next step: competitiveness

According to statistics released by the 2nd China International Conference Industry Festival held in Xiamen this week, there are about 150,000 summits and conferences each year: 70,000 of these are international.

These frequent meetings are part of an industry that generates a yearly \$280 billion (1.84 trillion yuan).

Dozens of cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Xiamen, Hangzhou and Chengdu are attempting to tap into that profit stream to boost their regional development by holding international conventions and exhibitions.

Xu Feng, chief marketing officer of China National Convention Center, said the convention and exhibition industry is still in the early stage of internationalization

even though the sheer number of conferences being held in China appears to place it near the top.

"China's conference industry is still following and learning from the decades of experience its Western counterparts have. Although it has developed fast, there is still a gap to close," he said.

The government is expected to establish an oversight process to direct the industry's development. "We usually put the industry under the care of the National Tourism Administration (NTA). However, the NTA lost its administrative power in 2000 when the State Council restructured the department. No state-level authorities are regulating the conference industry," he said.

Panda diplomacy

When Tokyo's Ueno Zoo secured the loan of two pandas late Monday night, it made headlines around the world. Many hope that the two guests will help thaw the chilled relations between the two countries, and also give Tokyo's economy a jolt.



A pair of giant pandas arrive at Narita International Airport on Monday. IC Photo

"The pandas are finally coming to town," a beaming Masahiro Kayano, a jewelry store owner in Ueno, told the Associated Press. "We are so excited."

Two 5-year-old pandas, female Xiannu and male Bili, arrived at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo late Monday, becoming the zoo's first pandas since the 2008 death of its beloved giant panda Ling Ling.

Despite late hours and the night chill, dozens of panda fans and neighbors gathered at the zoo's entrance to welcome them, calling their names and cheering as a truck carrying their cages went past, showered by flashlights.

Their arrival earlier at Tokyo's Narita Airport, with an aircraft landing on the runway and their cages taken out of the plane, was broadcast live on Japan's public broadcaster, NHK.

Ueno Zoo director Teruyuki Komiya said both new residents arrived in good health, though the male panda seemed a bit nervous.

"I'm so relieved that they arrived safely," Komiya said in a news conference in the early hours of Tuesday. "Bili seemed a bit nervous and whining, but Xiannu is very steady."

The two are expected to debut for the

public in late March following health checks and other procedures.

Promoting tourism

The Tokyo metropolitan government is renting the pandas for \$950,000 a year. The payments will help rebuild a Sichuan panda sanctuary that was nearly destroyed by the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake and fund Japan-China joint breeding projects.

Business and tourism officials expect the pandas to more than recoup that cost, boosting the local economy by about 20 billion yen (\$240 million), or 10 percent, a year, said Kayano, also a member of the town's panda task force.

Visitors to Ueno Zoo have fallen to around 3 million a year from 3.5 million since Ling Ling's death in 2008, 16 years after he arrived. When he died of illness at the age of 22, many Japanese sent condolence messages, bouquets and offerings to the zoo.

Release pandas into wild

China's giant panda training and breeding project suffered a major setback in 2007 when Xiang Xiang, a 5-year-old male, was found dead in a remote part of the Wolong Nature Reserve in Sichuan Province.

Xiang Xiang was released into the

wild in April 2006 after nearly three years of training.

With funds raised through loaning young pandas overseas, researchers developed delicate operations to train the pandas.

In a recent program, panda researchers donned panda suits to reduce human contact and prepare them for the wild.

Dressed in panda costumes, researchers moved a baby giant panda and its mother to a semi-wild environment in the Wolong Nature Reserve.

Panda Cao Cao and its cub were released into the reserve for the first time last December.

In an extremely delicate operation, their handlers wore bear costumes to minimize the impact of human contact.

The pandas will be monitored on a regular basis to ensure they have the best chance of survival in the wild. Breeding experts will keep a distance from their new home, watching their daily activities through hidden cameras.

Fences around the area are specially designed to ensure the pandas' safety from other animals and to prevent them from escaping.

(Agencies)

Analyst

Pandas lead way in boosting ties

By Huang Daohen

When China and Japan resumed diplomatic relations in 1972 the Chinese government sent a pair of pandas as peace messengers.

It worked.

But will it work again as ties between the two countries fell to a low point after recent disputes over a boat collision, rare earth exports and small islands in the East China Sea?

Wen Xiaoling, professor with the School of Politics and International Relations at Beijing Normal University, said the move came at a right time.

"Sometimes, the logy pandas are much better than the best-trained diplomats," she said.

"Diplomacy is sometimes more like

interpersonal relations. If a friend is mad at you, it's better to give a gift."

The tactic seems to have worked: the Japanese government laid out a red carpet for the guests; the Ueno area was prepared weeks in advance for the arrival of the pandas, with banners carrying panda cartoons and shops selling related goods; the Ueno Zoo spent about \$1.1 million to renovate the panda's new home.

Although Xiannu and Bili arrived late Monday night, dozens of local residents stayed up and waited for the arrival of the pair at the zoo.

Wen said the relationship will warm up if people from the two countries get to know each other better.

This is not the first time the Chinese government has used panda diplomacy.

From the 1950s to 1980s, the country sent 23 pandas as gifts to nine countries, including Russia, the US, France, the UK, Mexico, Germany and Spain.

The tactic stopped in the early 1980s due to a sharp decline in the panda population.

In recent years, pandas are leased out mainly for joint research. According to a report by Guangzhou-based *Southern Weekend*, a leased out panda usually gets \$1 million annually, which is used to protect wild pandas and fund research.

The State Forestry Administration said eight overseas countries have pandas. Singapore and the UK will be the next two countries to have pandas. Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macao each have four pairs of pandas.

The US to increase advertising in Chinese digital media

By Chu Meng

Voice of America (VOA) is set to cancel its radio and television broadcasts in both Mandarin and Cantonese, the *Washington Times* reported last Thursday.

Facing similar budget issues, Britain's Foreign Office, which funds British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, also said it would cut its grant by 16 percent, resulting in the closure of five language services. Radio programs in Mandarin will be among those to be scrapped.

Raymond Li, head of BBC Chinese, wrote on the BBC's website: "We have to end the radio programs due to financial pressures, but in the meantime we are also reaching out to an even bigger Chinese audience through new media channels such as Web and mobile phone operations."

According to the report, VOA's cuts were outlined as an \$8 million cost-cutting measure in the fiscal 2012 budget report of the Broadcasting Board of Governors, VOA's parent agency.

The plan called for shifting the focus from traditional shortwave and TV to new digital media, such as opening online broadcasts, websites and blogs, in order to cater to Chinese youths armed with portable Internet terminals.

If the US Congress approves the plan, all shortwave VOA radio and television broadcasts in Chinese, which was opened in 1942, will end October 1.

Thirty-eight of the 69 employees at VOA's Chinese section – including all seven from the Cantonese division – will be laid-off. Croatian programs were also mentioned as a potential cut.

This news came shortly after China broadcasted promotional images of itself on the big screen at Times Square in New York City.

Dana Rohrabacher, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, was cited by the *Washington Times* as saying, "The Chinese people are our greatest allies, and the free flow of unfiltered information is our greatest weapon."

Major Western media organizations, faced with big budget cuts, are turning to more modern ways to reach out to Chinese audiences, shifting their focus from shortwave radio to digital media.

The *Washington Times* reported that VOA's China branch will focus solely on digital media in the future. Fellow board member Enders Wibush said the cuts were made after surveys showed a sharp decline in shortwave radio listeners in most regions of China.

According to Chinese experts, the closure of such media services is mainly due to the transformation and innovation of media communications, which offer ways to reach audiences in a more efficient manner.

Li Liangrong, a professor of media studies at Shanghai-based Fudan University, said these media giants were realigning their resources to implement a cost-effective and market-specific strategy to reach target audiences in China after their financial recovery.

Meanwhile, the popularity of the Internet in China was another major reason for the cancellation of the radio broadcasts. Intellectuals and young people prefer online information sharing and virtual social networking, rather than old-fashioned radio and television programs, Li said.

Dark future for online games?

Shrinking youth population strains gaming industry

By Huang Daohen

The online game business is anything but child's play. Since taking off in 2000, the industry has grown to the point where it generated 32.4 billion yuan in sales revenue last year. The figure is expected to surpass 50 billion yuan by 2014.

But these rosy forecasts may be premature. A declining young population, stricter government regulation and severe competition from social networking sites may yet bury the online gaming industry.



Online gaming giant Shanda says it expects the coming years to be a struggle.

Jin Linwang/CFP Photo

Challenge of simplicity

Xiang Tao, a 21-year-old junior majoring in computer science at the Beijing Institute of Technology, is an online gamer. He used to spend 150 yuan per month on virtual items and stay up at night to slay mummies in Westward Journey, an online game operated by NetEase.

But now Xiang plays Happy Farm, a virtual farm game offered on the social networking sites Kaixin001.com and Renren. The farm allows players to grow pumpkins and vegetables that can be sold or stolen.

"I don't have much time to play big online games since I'm getting ready to graduate," Xiang said.

Under pressure from studies and job hunting, many students like Xiang prefer social networking services and simple phone games.

Simplicity is a challenging trend for the online gaming industry, said Li Lin, program director of Renren's parent Oak Pacific Interactive.

Micro transactions, like those in Happy Farm, do not require specialized software and can be played with any Internet browser. "They can appeal to more customers than a traditional multiplayer role-playing game," Li said.

Li said the smart phone apps produced by Apple, Microsoft and Sony may also take a bite out of players' game time. "The market will shift to smart phones as Android-powered devices get cheaper and more affordable," he said.

Demographic crisis

But the change in medium isn't what scares online gamemakers.

The country's school-age population is on the decline. College students are the group with the most time and money and are the industry's main market. But as more people in the '90s generation graduate and find work, the market will shrink, Li said.

Industry giants NetEase, Tencent and Shanda Interactive agreed. At a recent industrial conference, all said that 2010 was a difficult year.

According to a report by iResearch Consulting Group, though online game revenue increased 21 percent last year to 32.40 billion yuan, the growth rate slowed for a third consecutive year.

Shares of the three giants fell last year amid concern over slowing growth. Tencent's stock dropped 18 percent in Hong Kong and NetEase's fell 11 percent. Shanda's plunged 41 percent on the Nasdaq.

Erin Chen, analyst with iResearch, said further slowdown is a sure thing as the shrinking young population will dog the online gaming industry.

Though China has the largest population in the world, Chen said its youth population is declining due to the one-child policy.

Statistics from the Ministry of Education show that the number of first graders in primary schools dropped from 26 million in 1997 to roughly 17 million in 2005. The figure remained at about 18 million

between 2005 and 2009.

The number of college students, the majority of online gamers, has seen rapid growth over the past decade to 22 million in 2009. However, the growth rate has declined from 36 percent in 2000 to 6 percent in 2009.

"If that continues, the online gaming industry will soon reach an impasse," Chen said.

Chen said gaming companies have to change their business models and diversify into other genres. Tencent, for instance, has a community platform and can add entertainment and content.

"Tencent can become the Facebook of China," she said.

Stricter regulations

Adding to their woes is government interference, such as demands for real-name certification that deters some players from gaming.

Recently, the government ordered gaming operators to allow parents to watch their children's sessions to fight Internet addiction. Under the rules, parents can ban or restrict the children's playing time.

But Oak Pacific's Li said online gaming could have benefits for children's psychological health.

Li said students who play multi-player online games are more likely to develop friendships by interacting with others. "The more friendships a child experiences online, the better the child's psychological well being would be," he said.

Market watch

Domestic products dominate game industry

About 60 percent of the online gaming revenue last year was from domestic products, according to a report released last month during an annual conference of the country's online gaming industry.

The country's online and mobile gaming market generated 32.40 billion yuan in sales revenue, almost three times as much as the industry in the US, the report said.

Last year, domestic companies independently developed a total of 356 products, 35 more than the previous year. Among them, 82 games were available in 40 overseas countries.

The report said the Chinese Internet population rose to 457 million last year, 76 million of whom were online gamers.

The huge market has lured foreign online gaming giants to set up their bases in China. The France-based Ubisoft, one of the largest game developers in the world, is among them.

Ubisoft set up shop in Shanghai in 1996. "The Chinese game industry is growing up and changing the face of the gaming world," said Corrine Leroy, managing director of Ubisoft Shanghai.

"If you aren't in China, you aren't anywhere," he said.

But Erin Chen, analyst with iResearch, said the Chinese market still faces other barriers if it wants to go global.

Under current laws, foreign developers are not allowed to invest directly in China's gaming industry. They have to cooperate with local companies, like Tencent, to publish their games.

"If we do want to change the face of the world's industry, we have to open wide the door and work with overseas operators," she said.

Review of WTO commitments

Shifting to rule by law and transparency in governance

By Huang Daohen

The Chinese government has often been criticized for protective policies that limited market access for overseas goods and extracted advanced technology from foreign companies.

Wen Yi, an associate professor at Law School of Renmin University of China, disagrees that this is the government's intent. The foundation of World Trade Organization compliance is transparency and fair play, and the Chinese government has endeavored to amend its legal system to ensure both, Wen said.

The government has adjusted its role in the market and made remarkable strides to improve transparency, Wen said.

A series of policies has reduced the opportunities for officials to agree on trade policies between closed doors.

The Commerce Ministry, for instance, was one of the first government bodies to take steps toward conforming to WTO expectations.

Lawyers are also playing an increasingly important role in the government's legislative process, Wen said.

According to statistics from the Ministry of Justice, as many as 200,000 legal experts and lawyers serve as officials or consultants to the government at different levels.

In the past years, lawyers have assisted in local reform measures, urban planning and construction, as well as assisting in international cooperation.

Wen said many officials have started to seek legal advice before making a decision on major issues concerning economic and social development.

"We need to shift from the past model of administration to one based on law," Wen said.

Apart from providing legal advice, law experts have also been active in training the country's governmental officials in how the law works.

The National Statistics Bureau, which recently reformed how the country collects and keeps statistics, said it has unified the country's accounting and statistical systems in compliance with WTO obligations.

The government promised to make transparent and clear all its basic statistical activities and put the activities under public supervision after it joined the WTO.

Scramble for art

Are art academies the only way young people seeking stardom?



Students wait for the results of the Beijing Film Academy entrance exam.

Alex/CFP Photo

By Li Zhixin

Thousands of students from across the country to Beijing this month to attend the college entrance exams for art students, chasing their dreams of stardom.

Zhou Dongyu, the heroine of Zhang Yimou's film *Under the Hawthorn Tree*, is one of the candidates for the performance department of Beijing Film Academy (BFA).

Zhou may be widely known across China, but she's unsure whether she'll be able to pass the two professional tests required to be accepted into the department. More than 4,700 students have applied for only 30 openings this year.

The broadcast department of Communication University of China (CUC) is another popular choice

among students. It attracted more than 7,000 candidates, even though the department is only accepting 100 students this year.

Beside BFA and CUC, other art academies like the Central Academy of Drama (CAD), Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Central Conservatory of Music (CCOM), Beijing Dance Academy (BDA) and other universities with art departments launched examinations this week.

The high demand for these prestigious art academies isn't new. "The news about how stars make big money and lead bright lives is leading to parents enrolling their children in art academies," said Han Xia, 22, a senior at BFA.

He said many of his classmates

have been eager to seek fame, and they're using their program as a vehicle towards that elusive goal.

Meanwhile, many students apply for the art academies only because the required admission score is relatively low compared with other universities.

"Fifty to 60 percent of candidates belong to this group," said He Keke, the deputy dean of Cinema and Television Department of CAD. "Take some of the candidates in the directing department of BFA, for instance. Since they were busy studying for college entrance exams, they hardly had time to watch any movies when they were high school seniors, let alone expand their knowledge of directors."

Comment

Shame on art

Due to Zhou Dongyu's success as a "pure girl," many students have been using the tactic of acting innocent and "pure."

These art tests are closely associated with societal trends. It's really a shame, because art shouldn't be linked with how one looks and behaves. It should come from within.

— Duan Qigang, an editor

Multiple ways to become an artist

There are many ways to become an artist. Excellent artists don't necessarily come from art academies. A free, open and tolerant society that respects individuality can stir up people's creativity and help them discover different methods of realiz-

ing their artistic dream.

There are several potential problems with the art test fever. First, many folk arts are endangered because the public prefers modern entertainment. Second, graduates of art academies stay within their circles and are seemingly unconcerned about global issues. Third, people are so concerned about making money overnight that academies seldom cultivate real artists — just idols.

— Li Xin, a civil servant

Good cultural environment be promoted by all of society

The goal of art academies is to cultivate qualified art creators and make talented people even better, but we can't promise that they'll become famous.

China's film and television arts are still in their infancy, though we have developed very fast in the last three decades. Art academies require a refined cultural environment that is promoted by all of society.

— Zhou Bing, a teacher at Beijing Film Academy

Dodging the pressures of employment

Many parents and students are turning to the film and television industry because they're worried that they can't find jobs in other sectors. But lots of students aren't actually interested in making a career in art; they don't know the pros and cons of enrollment.

— Tian Jingtong, a mother

Does China have too much intangible cultural heritage?

By Zhang Dongya

"Statistics show that there are 172 different kinds of drama in China. If all of them are preserved as intangible cultural heritage (ICH), the value of all of them would be watered down," Yu Qiuyu, a controversial scholar, wrote in a controversial article titled "Cultural selection helps make room for cultural innovation."

As the former president of the Shanghai Theater Academy, Yu wrote, "I am very familiar with Chinese opera." He said eliminating some dramas wouldn't be bad for culture.

"We have talked much about cultural innovation, but it requires space. Where will the space for innovation come from?" he wrote. "As is well known, many local operas lack audience and patrons; some are basically dead."

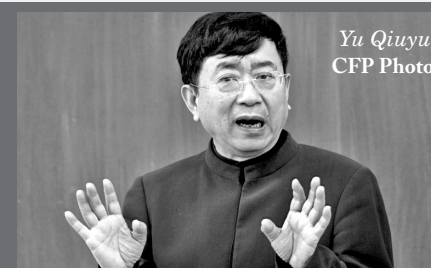
Yu's opinion stirred a dispute about the protection of local operas. A scholar named Chen Cai wrote a response called "Yu Qiuyu is destroying drama."

Chen said Yu was basically advocating the "slaughtering of local operas."

"Some hope to help these operas by listing them as ICH," Chen wrote. "But Yu, who is 'so familiar with Chinese dramas,' believes in adding by subtracting. What he is actually doing is destroying local operas."

Chen's belief is that people should protect "weak culture" instead of eliminating it. He cited the example that 200 years ago, people protected both the Latvian and Lithuanian languages when one language would have sufficed; the Republic of Lithuania, when it became an independent country, claimed two languages as "native."

Chen said a Chinese National Academy of Arts survey conducted in the late 1950s showed there were 368 local operas and national operas. In 2005, only 267 remained. Among them, about 60 dramas exist without related audiovisual material.



Yu Qiuyu
CFP Photo

Comment

Local operas still have large audience

It is necessary to protect local operas because it is still welcomed in certain local areas. Shaoxing Opera, for example, has a big following in Shanghai. The local government organizes training classes and invites professional artists to teach amateurs to perform yueju. The amateur troupe is welcomed among people because their performance is good and their tickets are cheap. They have received many performing opportunities in community events organized by the local Bureau of Culture.

— Wu Guoxiang, Shaoxing Opera player in Shanghai

Culture environment improving

I partly agree with Yu Qiuyu, but it's sad. The present reality is that local operas are not thriving in China. The masses are inclined toward a more "vulgar" culture, which is where the money is.

Traditional arts and culture shouldn't be overlooked, but the future isn't bright. Maybe the local government should think about ways of making local operas profitable. If that doesn't happen, they can only exist through national funding — essentially we're hooking opera up to a breathing machine to keep it alive.

— Zhang Rui, theater critic in Beijing

Attendance talks

I am not against Yu's idea. If a drama has no audience at all, it doesn't make sense to preserve it by giving it a shot now and then. This isn't a positive way of developing arts and culture.

Also, protection itself is destroying these operas because original features aren't always preserved.

— Wzs73, blogger at t.sina.cn

Weibo expands dating pool



Wang Chuan, founder of a popular Weibo site to help singles

Photo provided by Wang Chuan

By Annie Wei

When the public learned about Yu Jianrong's grassroots campaign to find missing children by posting pictures of them online, both Yu and his project became a national sensation.

Yu's project is hosted by Weibo, a microblogging service created by Sina. Within a month, Weibo had attracted 200,000 new followers. Many of these first-time Weibo users came up with their own ideas of how to use the site.

One of the more promising new ideas is a site that helps spinsters connect with single men. Wang Chun, 35, created a site that was a spin-off of Yu's; instead of missing children, however, he posted pictures of single women desperate for a date.

In the two weeks since its creation, the site attracted more than 42,000 followers.

Photographing single women

Wang is an IT freelancer who runs small grassroots sites and has lived in Beijing for a decade. Although he didn't formally study computer science, he was always passionate about the Internet.

"When I heard about the [Yu's] *suishoupai* – instant photography – I thought it was so interesting and creative," Wang said. He began thinking about other places to apply this idea.

As a veteran online forum administrator, Wang knew that topics about women were always attention-grabbers. He thought about "leftover" women – older women who are still unmarried. He wondered why a Weibo account couldn't be used as a platform for these women to find potential mates.

The first woman to post her photo was a model. But later she asked Wang to take the picture down. "She didn't want people to criticize her as trying to be sensationalist," he said.

The site quickly exploded in popularity. Opened four days before Valentine's Day, the account had 3,000 followers by day two and 4,000 more one day later.

"I did not expect it to have such a strong influence," Wang said.

By the fourth day, women were sending Wang thank-you cards and relating stories about their happy dates.

Wang created another splinter Weibo site to share stories of people who had successful dates.

"There were quite a few interesting stories," Wang said.

One woman from Guangzhou posted a photo of herself standing between two sculptures in a park, which grabbed the attention of a young man who happened to be at the exact same spot 10 days earlier. The man believed it was fate and emailed the woman to meet.

"She refused at first," Wang said. But the man was persistent. She finally conceded that if his story of why he wanted to meet her could be forwarded 100 times, she might agree to a meeting.

What happened next, cyber romantics will say, is a testament to the power of the Internet: the post was forwarded not 100 times, but more than 2,000.

The woman eventually emailed Wang with a photo of her drinking tea with the young man, and a note saying they had begun dating.

Another woman emailed Wang and asked him to post her mother's photo. "It was touching," Wang said. "The woman was leaving Dalian to work in another city. She said she hoped there was a single man somewhere who could keep her single mother company."

The post was ready by a young man living in the same city who happened to be looking for a girlfriend – for his father.

"She confirmed that her mother agreed to meet the other guy's father," Wang said.



Older Chinese women constantly face pressure to find a suitable spouse.

CFP Photo



More than 10,000 people participating in a matchmaking event in Shenyang, Liaoning Province.

CFP Photo

More efficient than e-dating sites or agencies

Wang said he was proud of his sites. In addition to the 42,000 followers on the spinsters' site, there are about 27,000 signed up for a leftover men's site. Wang has forwarded more than 8,700 posts in two weeks and nine relationships have been formed due to his service.

Wang said his experience with traditional dating sites has shown him their weaknesses. "Those sites are not well-designed, and they are more like thick phone books," he said.

Weibo is more interactive, Wang said. "It gives a rounder picture of a person, her friends, what she reads and what she likes."

In addition, "I filter the information first," Wang said. He prefers real and natural photos and clear notes of description.

"Real stories touch people."

Li Yiliang, 30, a beauty editor for *Life-style Magazine*, had her photo sent by a colleague to Wang and forwarded along.

Li was shocked by the stir Weibo could generate.

"Even my friends' friends' friends saw that post," she said.

On one hand, Li felt it was amazing how much attention and flattering compliments she received. But she was also shocked and upset by how mean and evil total strangers could be when making comments on her photo.

Many people have the same concern of being attacked online, Wang said. Therefore, he posts lots of encouraging comments to get people to come out of their shells.

How to capitalize financially?

As New Media steals advertisers away from TV and traditional media, more PR companies are turning to sites like Weibo to woo potential advertisers and clients.

Wang Yajun, chief editor and publisher of *Elegancy*, a leading lifestyle magazine about the emerging upper class of second-tier cities, has 12,000 followers. "I haven't really had any advertising yet," she said, "but advertising companies told me other bloggers with my size of following can charge 80 yuan per post and 100 yuan

with a photo."

Many bloggers have more followers than Wang Yajun, but it's easy to fake the numbers. People simply create multiple accounts and click "follow."

The industry price is 200 yuan for 20,000 followers.

"It's easy to tell the quality of a Weibo account's followers," Wang Chuan said. Fake followers don't forward posts. A good post that can stir public interest is forwarded 50 to 60 times, Wang said.

Wang Chuan's Weibo site had a small sponsor from a diamond vendor, who gives away rings to women who are brave enough to post their information and photo on Wang's Weibo.

Wang Chuan said his account must remain grassroots in order to optimally help people in need. But he said if a suitable business model were presented to him, he'd consider it.

One of his ideas is to have a team of volunteer matchmakers who could help people find potential matches online.

The first China-EU Year of Youth launched in Beijing

By Chu Meng

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and the European Union's newly appointed ambassador to China, Markus Ederer, attended the opening ceremony of the China-EU Year of Youth in Beijing on Wednesday, joining more than 500 young people from China and the EU in downtown's Capital Museum.

The yearlong youth exchange campaign is the first of its kind between China and the EU since the establishment of diplomatic ties, and is also the largest-ever China-EU cultural exchange program.

The program aims to encourage young people from China and the EU to build a brighter future for bilateral strategic partnerships.

"The program has revealed the resolution of both Chinese and European leaders to establish a brighter platform for younger generations to communicate, to interact and to cooperate with one another," said European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso in a video that was aired at the ceremony. "Youngsters from both sides will bring vitality and energy to bilateral relations through this platform."

"The relations between China and all EU member countries will be more vibrant in the future and full of hope," Wen said.

Wen hopes that young people from both sides will always be brave in pursuing innovation and the truth. He also encouraged them to learn from each other in a frank and open spirit, in a bid



100 youngsters from European countries and China co-launched the first EU-China Year of Youth program in Beijing. CFP Photo

to jointly create a better future for China-EU ties.

Wen and Barroso jointly initiated the China-EU Year of Youth during the 12th EU-China summit held in 2009. The Year of Youth offers an interactive platform for European and Chinese young people to enhance mutual understanding and friendship and also inject vitality to China-EU relations.

Along with the opening ceremony in Beijing, 100 European youth participants from 27 EU member countries, selected from the European Youth Forum in 2010, were immersed in two-day

discussions with Chinese youth on topics such as culture, education, volunteering, creativity and environmental protection starting Tuesday.

"We had excellent discussions on possible cooperation projects, ranging from environmental protection, world heritage to art and intellectual property," said Pierre Arlaud, a member of a EU youth delegation.

"I can feel there is a strong will from both sides to deepen understanding and forge a stronger partnership," he added.

The opening ceremony was the first in a series of exchange

activities that will be held throughout the year in China and Europe. The events include cultural seminars, volunteer service conferences, youth summer camps and TV debates.

The yearlong program was co-hosted by the Communist Youth League of China, All-China Youth Federation and the European Commission. The initiative aims to promote intercultural dialogue and strengthen mutual understanding and friendship between young people in China and the EU, as well as encouraging them to support the development of China-EU relations.

Finish ambassador promote healthy food to Chinese consumers

By Chu Meng

On Wednesday, Finnish ambassador Lars Backstrom said he will help Chinese consumers eat healthier: a leading health food manufacturer in Finland is looking for Chinese business partners.

Unlike many embassy press conferences, which are rigid and solemn affairs, the Finnish ambassador added some levity to his press conference by handing out yogurt, milk, fruit drinks and snacks brought from Finland.

"I had them when I was back in Finland," he said. "For I, in my 50s, have a little bit of an elevated cholesterol level. It will gradually lead to cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases such as heart attacks."

According to the Beijing Health Ministry, because of more diverse food choices and the invasion of more international eating habits, including more meats, fats and dairy products - coupled with less exercise - more than 155 million adults in China have elevated cholesterol levels, and by 2012 more than 100 million will be diagnosed with heart disease.

In Chinese cuisine, some uniquely popular foods actually spike cholesterol levels, such as duck meat and egg yolk. Many other signature Chinese dishes use excessive seasoning.

"Organs, which are an extremely popular Beijing snack food, are especially high in cholesterol. Peking duck and lamb hotpot contain a high level of cholesterol as well," Backstrom said.

China's aging population is especially susceptible to diseases related to elevated cholesterol levels.

In Finland, pioneering food manufacturers lead the world by developing low-cholesterol foods with natural plant-based ingredients.

Backstrom said he would very much like to help interested and capable Chinese food producers cooperate with Finnish partners to create low-cholesterol products.

"With collaboration between Finnish manufacturers and Chinese food companies, we will be given a convenient and flexible solution to address the growing consumer need for cholesterol-lowering foods and beverages and innovating products that exclusively cater to the taste buds of Chinese people," said Mikko Laavainen, commercial director of Raisio Group, a food producer.

The ambassador said that normally in Finland, the government works with health professionals, the public, food manufacturers and other organizations to examine lifestyle choices to improve public health.

High cholesterol was among the issues considered, as it was already recognized as one of the significant risk factors for cardiovascular disease, the main cause of death in Finland at the present time.

Italy's 150th anniversary of unification celebration launched in embassy

By Chu Meng

Cultural Counselor of the Italian Embassy in China, Barbara Alighiero, launched a celebration of Italy's 150 years of unification on Tuesday and extended a warm invitation to people to visit her home country.

March 17 will be the 150th anniversary of Italian unification. From this month until November, "Experience Italy," a series of themed activities, celebrations, art exhibitions and shows, will take place in Torino and the Piedmont region of northwest Italy, according to the cultural counselor.

"It is offering people from China, as well as the world, another reason to travel to Italy, to get to know its culture and people," she said.

She added that with extensive experience hosting international events, from the 2006 Winter Olympics to the biennial Salone del Gusto - the largest food festival in the world - Torino has become accustomed to greeting guests.



Italian history professor Giulio Machetti (middle), Cultural Counselor of the Italian Embassy Barbara Alighiero (left)

Photo provided by Luo Rui

The embassy in Beijing will also hold activities such as movies, shows and art exhibitions.

Giulio Machetti, a professor of contemporary history at the University of Napoli, gave a lecture introducing the origin, transformation and unification of this nation-state to Italian students at international schools in Beijing and Chinese university students

who major in Italian.

In 1861, nine separate kingdoms were unified to form what people know today as Italy. Torino was the first national capital. Vittorio Emanuele II of the Savoy house became the first Italian King.

Machetti introduced Italian development chronologically, referring to significant dates

in modern Italian history and reporting them in the context of national unity. He also described what has drawn Italians together or divided them.

He said the dream of unity cannot completely mask differences in a country where regional conflicts still exist.

"The idea behind the birthday celebrations was to show that Italy has overcome its traditional regional divides, especially between the wealthy north and the underdeveloped, mob-ridden south," the professor said.

Since 2009, Machetti has moved his academic concentration away from theoretical history studies to a 100-year-old block of Italian buildings in Tianjin. There, he devoted himself to restoring the buildings and educating others about the historic value of the area.

Near the Marco Polo Square, an Italian-style area near Tianjin Haihe River was built in 1902 and remains the only well-preserved complex of Italian-style architecture in Asia.

NGO leads domestic fair trade campaign

By Liang Meilan

Last Saturday, some 40 people teamed up at Sculpting in Time Café to witness the anniversary of the mainland's first fair trade wedding, held last year on Hong Kong's Lamma Island.

The ceremony featured cupcakes, coffee and tea made from raw materials

provided by fair trade organizations.

Fair trade, common in the West, seeks to promote sustainable livelihood for people in the world's poorest regions by employing them to make goods for those who are able to pay a little extra for them.

"But China has yet to catch on to the practice," said Chen Lecong, who organized the fair trade wedding. She is

among the pioneers of fair trade in the Chinese mainland.

Chen runs a fair trade NGO that helps marginalized producers develop creative products. Even more ambitious, she has devoted herself to laying down strict standards for a fledgling industry that constantly faces skeptics and the specter of mistrust.

All the items used in Chen Lecong's wedding were fair trade goods.

Photo by Wei Yuyu



Wedding supports fair trade

At the anniversary party, Chen and her husband, together with fair trade practitioners, recalled that except for the diamond ring, all items used at the wedding – from the cake to invitation cards – were fair trade products.

"I was delighted to share my fair-trade lifestyle with my family and guests," Chen said.

Fair trade is a social movement that builds trade relationships to give reasonably higher wages to producers in exchange for elevated social and environmental standards in poorer countries. In particular, the focus is on importing handicrafts, coffee, honey, wine and chocolate from developing countries.

As to why Chen decided to have a fair trade wedding, she said: "I was shocked when I read a slogan on the main page of Think Fair, a fair trade fashion company in the UK, which said, 'Don't buy an ebay bargain dress made in Chinese sweatshops, get one of our home-grown designs!'"

Unable to find a fair trade dress on the market, Chen decided to create one. She found a deaf fashion designer, who in turn helped find a migrant sewer in Guangzhou.

"I insisted on paying the sewer a reasonable price to make the deal fair, so the designer raised the price from 1,200 yuan to 1,800 yuan," Chen said. "Still, I was content."



Chen Lecong in a fair trade wedding dress

Photo by Song Zhenping



Chen Lecong (middle) coaches the staff of her fair trade NGO in the office.

Photo provided by iFAIR

'Trade, not aid'

In 2007, Chen was working for iMART, a charity event that promotes independent designers' works. Its founder Liu Qiongxiang came up with the idea of outsourcing the production to skilled artisans in poor villages.

They didn't know it, but by paying the artisans a respectable wage, they were engaging in fair trade. Out of this step, iFAIR was created, with Chen Lecong acting as the director general.

iFAIR is recognized as

the country's first registered charitable NGO promoting fair trade.

Its first program was in collaboration with workers in Dujiangyan, Sichuan Province, where numerous women suffered from unemployment following the 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake that devastated the region. iFAIR contracted simple handicrafts from Dujiangyan workers and formed a cooperative society called Fire Phoenix.

The designer, Chen Yu, found a group of work-

ers to produce a batch of cloth dolls. Chen Yu provided the designs and raw material, and Fire Phoenix's workers were in charge of the production.

Chen Lecong made sure the workers got no less than 10 percent of the profit. "Conventional trade can offer 6 percent at most," she said.

Unlike many NGOs that primarily give monetary aid, iFAIR's mission is to empower those in need under the philosophy of "trade, not aid" – the original slogan of

the European fair trade movement.

"Some organizations just donate money to villages or farmers in the name of fair trade but don't care about whether their products sell," Chen Lecong said. "When the money runs out, the program ends. This goes against the principles of fair trade."

iFAIR helps distribute products in real and online stores. Also, in the cooperation contracts, regulations about product quality are clearly written.

The future of fair trade

There are only a few CSR-oriented corporations that run fair trade, and most are in the fields of agriculture and handicraft. Famous names include Shangri-la Farm, which produces coffee beans out of Yunnan Province, and Handaffection, which sells silver jewelry made by village artisans.

Still small in scale, iFAIR only makes several thousand yuan of profit each year. And organizers consistently ask themselves whether the 10 percent wage standard is fair.

Chen, a self-styled idealist, said her NGO is still in its trial stages. Her focus is on building a reasonable standard and creating a tool for tracking costs and profits in the fair trade field.

Her biggest worry, for the moment, is that conventional trade will outpace fair trade and squeeze out ethical practices.

"Without enough transparency in the absence of industry regulation, people will take advantage of the system," she said, "and businessmen may earn huge profits in the name of fair trade by paying very little to producers."

Advocating ethical purchases

One important function of the NGO is to convey the idea of fair trade to the public and call on more people to join the movement, and at the same time to popularize a lifestyle of spending money to support disadvantaged workers.

Chen Lecong is determined to be a trailblazer in China, even though she feels the country is still "10 or 20 years" away from embracing the fair trade concept.

With years of public relations and commu-

nications experience in large companies, Chen is good at conducting event marketing and expanding brand influence. She applies her skills to fair trade by frequently holding community-driven events and lectures.

Gradually, these events have gotten more followers, and her company more partners.

Like-minded charities helping villagers or laid-off workers have asked iFAIR for help in distributing their handicrafts.

Some shop owners have joined the campaign by offering shelf space for iFAIR's products. Green Room, a coffee shop in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, is one example of a shop that's taken the fair trade concept to heart. It sells coffee made by fair trade producers.

Leng Cheng, an intern at an iFAIR charity bazaar, said fair trade is a feasible way of solving a social problem.

"It's amazing to learn that in fair trade, every

purchase matters in terms of narrowing the gap between the rich and poor," Ling said.

Another frontier for fair trade is on college campuses, as university students tend to be more accepting of socially responsible practices.

"They are the driving force for the development of fair trade," Chen said. "But what's disappointing is that every time we give lectures at universities, almost no one can figure out what fair trade is."

Competition to promote green transportation

By Zhao Hongyi

As professionals return to Beijing and students begin their new semester, the city's roadways and environment will be put under tremendous stress.

To promote "green transportation," *Beijing Youth Daily* has begun a contest where it will list a number of hotspots around the city and invite readers to send what they think is the best way to navigate from Point A to B.

The organizer has invited five volunteers and a group of local transportation experts to grade the entries. The experts include taxi drivers Yu Kai from the Capital Automobile Taxi Company and Zhang Heming, nicknamed "Beijing Map"; and Zhang Xiaoyu, a subway train conductor who has traversed more than 800,000 kilometers of railway.

"We're contributing to a greener environment for Beijing," Yu said. "It's worth a try."

The competition also aims to encourage residents to take publication transportation or bike instead of driving private vehicles.

Zhang said Beijing has a very sophisticated public transportation network, and that commuters are better off using that than cars, which are liable to get stuck in traffic and create pollution.

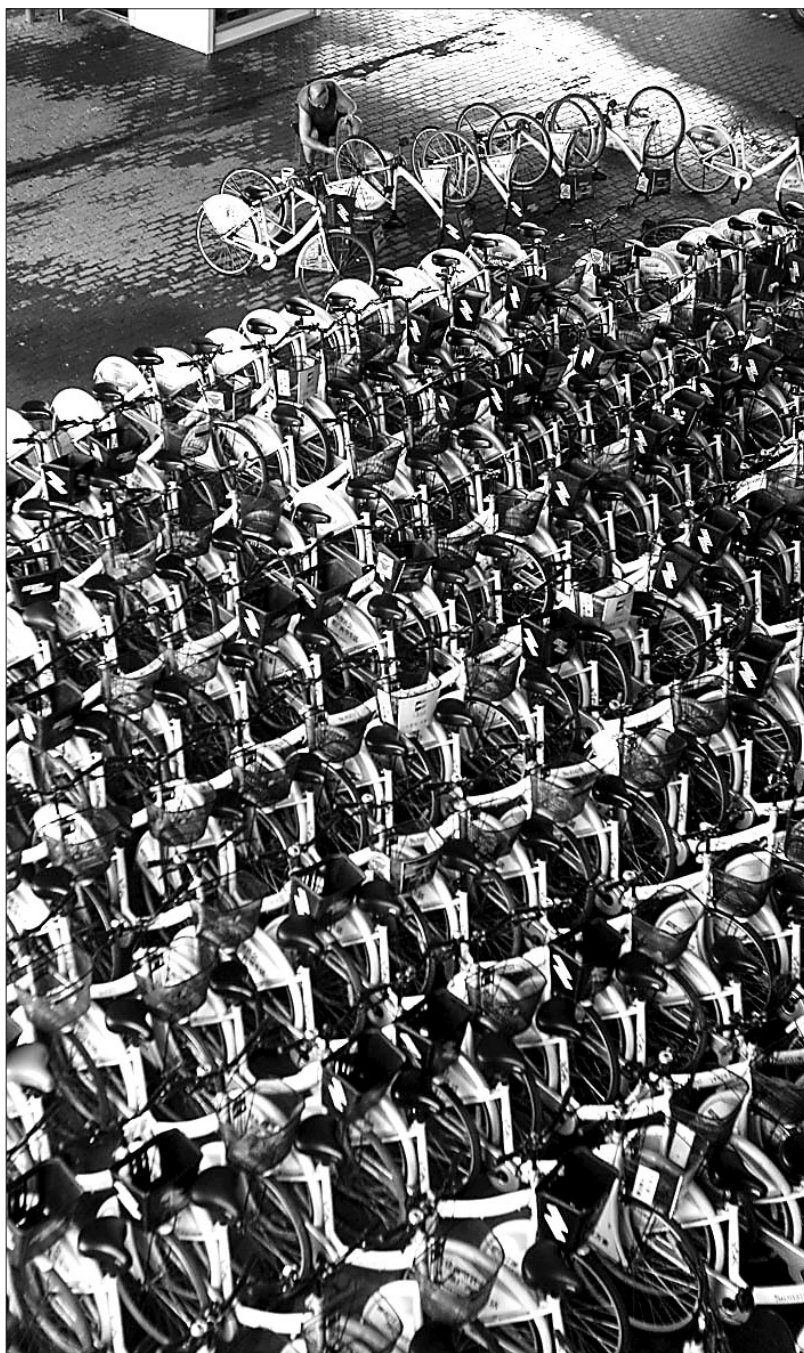
The first route citizens are asked to comment on, released this week, is from Yuquanying on South Third Ring Road to the China Science and Technology Museum on the northeast corner of the National Olympic Plaza, located near North Fourth Ring Road and the Bird's Nest.

Participants need to design the most economic and environmentally friendly route by either choosing one route or combining different types of transportation modes to reach the destination.

The organizer will invite two or three outstanding entrants to participate in a final competition. Volunteers and reporters from *Beijing Youth Daily* will try the different routes, and the winning design will win an award.

Designs must utilize low-carbon transportation and be as detailed as possible.

Designs should be emailed to Beijing Youth Daily at bjhotline@vip.sina.com or faxed to 6590 2008.



Cities all over the country are encouraging citizens to ride bicycles.

CFP Photo

ASK Beijing Today

Email your questions to:
weiyi@ynet.com

Where can I buy an American football?

Most sports stores do not carry these since American football isn't widely played here. We recommend Taobao.com. Type the Chinese characters for American football in the search box and you can find not only footballs but also many related products, like cleats and jerseys. Most footballs are priced less than 100 yuan, but you can bargain further if you wish.

The Chinese girl I'm dating is an online game addict. She often goes to Internet cafes, and I worry about her health in such a poor environment filled with second-hand smoke. What am I to do?

For starters, there are non-smoking Internet cafes at Chaoyangmen Wai Dajie by Bainaohui, an electronics shopping mall. Look for Bodian Internet Cafe, which has 300 computers. Most people will be able to direct you to it. As for her games addiction – ever thought about investing in a board game the two of you could play together?

I'll be leaving soon for Australia and I am busy with disposing of my properties. I'd like to know if it's possible for me to withdraw the remaining sum of 500 yuan from IC card?

Sure, you can get it back. There are a few places where you can return IC cards and get your deposit back. One is at the Andingmen subway station, and another at the Xidan subway station. They do not have very clear signs for returning IC cards, so you will need to ask a warden for directions.

I want to make some authentic American cornbread, but I need to find the ingredients first. I had no success at Jenny Lou's. Can you help?

Go to the bulk rice and grains section of any local grocery store or wet market. Corn flour is cheap in China and available every everywhere in bulk.

(By Liang Meilan)

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Stories of a ba

Villagers' struggle a triumph of the spirit

By He Jianwei

Xihaigu, a mountainous area in the south of Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, is one of China's poorest regions and one pitied by UNESCO as one of the world's most unlivable places.

But the local people's persistence and dauntlessness in the face of harsh weather and barren soil is documentary gold. Through Zha Xiaoyun's camera, we see a triumph of the human spirit as people live with dignity despite their abject poverty.

This Saturday, Zha will show two of his documentaries at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in 798 Art District.

Zha Xiaoyuan, 54, got his start in filmmaking when he volunteered to teach at a small village in the impoverished Xihaigu in 2004.

Drought and natural disasters are the main cause of the area's plight. Nearly 80 percent of the land is regularly damaged by soil erosion, drought, hail, frost, flooding and windstorms.

The harsh environment was a big change for Zha, who previously worked for 10 years as an engineer at the Ningxia Bureau of Posts and Telecommunications and for 12 years as an entrepreneur.

When Zha turned 47, he decided to give up his business and became a volunteer teacher.

"I wanted to do something that would not make a profit even though I was still supporting my family," Zha said. "At first, my parents couldn't understand why I was leaving my business. I told them it would be one year as a volunteer teacher. It was a 'great' job in their mind."

When he was sent out to the school, he took along a camera and a video recorder to record his life for fun. One month later, he recorded something else: the first photos of a 16-year old boy who went to work at the local paper mill and returned home in a coffin after an accident.

Zha soon found himself recording the villagers' weddings. "They continue the traditional rituals, because these are important and memorable moments in their lives," he said.

One of the films that will be shown at the UCCA is the 59-minute full-length documentary *Pass Away*. Its Chinese title means to return to Allah. In it, Zha documents the daily lives of two elderly Muslims in Xihaigu and their attitudes toward life as death draws near.

Luo Yansheng, the man in his 90s, lives with his wife, who is in her 70s. Luo survived the Gansu Earthquake of 1920, which killed more than 70,000 in Haiyuan County.

Although life is hard, he and his wife have each other to rely on for comfort. Luo's only wish is that things can be easier for his wife, and that she could live out her days in peace without worrying too much about her children and their future.

When death arrives, their children and friends arrange a solemn and traditional Muslim funeral in hopes that the deceased will be able to rest in peace.

Pass Away is not Zha's first full-length documentary. That honor goes to *The Family of Rug Weaver Lao Ma*, a film he spent two years recording and another two years editing.

When Zha arrived in Xihaigu, he was curious about a group of people who picked the blue-green

hair moss anchoring the fine soil in place and retaining moisture to support other plants.

"Because of its high profits, many villagers – men and women, both ragged and neat – joined in to pick hair moss. They carried blackened pots hanging from sticks," he said. "I wondered where they came from, where they were going, how they lived and how they saw themselves."

It is a vicious circle.

Drought and natural disasters have robbed the villagers of their harvest. A shortage of grain has forced them to dig for grass. And their hair moss picking has in turn weakened the ecosystem to ensure next year's harvest.

At one afternoon in September 2004, when Zha visited a student at home, he heard a man singing a song from 40 years ago. Soon he became friends with the old man, Lao Ma, a devout Muslim and hard-working rug weaver and farmer who scraped out a living for himself and his family.

But years of drought have destroyed the soil and ruined the harvest, so the three generations of his family now face a life of perpetual poverty.

Although he was poor several decades ago, he lived a more relaxed life, singing songs and playing chess in the square. "Most of their lives have changed dramatically in recent decades. They face a new pressure, because they know they cannot have a future on this land," Zha said.

The family has spread out to harvest moss and toil in the coal mines. In the first part, Lao Ma is burdened by the loans he took out to pay for his son's marriage. As

his grandchild's delivery date approaches and his daughter-in-law faces complications, they can only pray.

UCCA will show the second part, *Moving*. When a new irrigation project was planned in Ningxia, many villagers moved to the villages along the Yellow River. In some impoverished villages, almost all residents left to find new houses.

Moving depicts Lao Ma as he buys a new house in the area by the irrigation project. It seems that while he has a future, it is not one that suits him.

"In the two years I spent making this film, I think I have come to understand the life of Lao Ma and his family. Before I made this film, I was fairly certain that I was living my life the way I should. Today I have doubts," Zha said.

"I hope that more people have the opportunity to see this film and to better understand the lives of people like Lao Ma and his family and neighbors."

"In the two years I spent making this film, I think I have come to understand the life of Lao Ma and his family. Before I made this film, I was fairly certain that I was living my life the way I should. Today I have doubts."



1. *Pass Away* tells the daily lives of two elderly Muslims in Xihaigu and their c

arren land

Center stage



Pass Away (2008) and Moving (2009)

Where: Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), 798 Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District
When: February 26, 4 pm
Admission: 15 yuan per film, 10 yuan for students per film
Tel: 8459 9269



3

attitudes toward life as death draws near. 2-3. Moving depicts Lao Ma as he buys a new house in the area by the irrigation project.

Photos provided by the UCCA

BEIJING TODAY

Editor: He Jianwei Designer: Deng Ning

Examining contemporary Chinese and French literature

By He Jianwei

Chinese and French writers, critics and translators discussed the literary works of both cultures during a two-day seminar at the National Museum of Modern Chinese Literature last month.

Participants shared their views on how classical works influence contemporary creations, how reality is addressed in stories and translation problems.

Tie Ning, president of the Chinese Writers' Association, said the two countries have long and strong literary ties. "Ancient and contemporary French writers have influenced several generations of Chinese writers. Their works inspired us. And many Chinese classical works also have many readers in France," Tie said.

Chinese writers have drawn inspiration from Western novels, especially those in the styles of realism, romanticism and surrealism as exemplified by writers like Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Emile Zola, Marcel Proust, Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus.

Tie said French writers and readers are familiar with Chinese classics, such as *The Analects* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

But she warned that contemporary writers risk succumbing to commercialization in today's publishing environment. She described writers as gardeners planting fake and showy flowers, which reflect their impatience, indifference and dishonesty in creation.



"We live in a commercialized world and everything seems like fast food. Due to the market's orientation, some writers don't care about the quality and duty of literature anymore," she said.

Both French and Chinese participants said literature is a mirror reflecting all corners of society.

"There is no difference between writing and experiencing life for writers. We cannot stop writing like that; we cannot escape from the reality," said Paul de Sinety, director of the publication and written word department at the French Institute.

Chinese writer Li Er, who has an abundant experience in international literature exchange, agreed, but pointed out that the situation for contemporary writers is more complicated.

"We have experienced three

major shifts in society in recent decades from the planned economy to market economy and now globalization. It is difficult for Chinese writers to express this 'changing experience,' which is rarely understood by the Western world," Li said.

He said that was why many Chinese writers pen epics instead of short stories. "Only long novels can reveal the complexity of our experience," he said.

But despite the popularity of French novels in China, translators struggle to introduce contemporary Chinese works into France.

Sylvie Gentil, the translator of Yan Lianke, Mian Mian and Liu Suola, said cultural misunderstandings do more to wreck a translation than any mistakes in grammar.

"A translator is thief," Gentil

said. "He or she steals words to bring readers to a foreign country in their native language."

When she selects for works to introduce to France, she is careful to balance her own tastes with readers' general interest in Chinese contemporary literature.

"The French public would like to read about traditional China, best represented by works with rural themes by Mo Yan and Yan Lianke, and new perspectives represented by the works of younger writers born in the 1970s and 1980s," she said.

Initiated by late president of the French National Library Jean-Pierre Angremy, this regular seminar first took place in November 2009 in Paris. This second event was organized by the French Embassy, the Chinese Writers' Association and the French Institute of Culture.

South African Nobel laureate tracks her time

By Charles Zhu

Nadine Gordimer, one of the most prominent writers in South Africa, has collected her essays written between 1954 and 2008 in *Telling Times*. The compilation offers a rare glimpse into the life and thoughts of a Nobel laureate.

In 1954's "A South African Childhood," Gordimer recalls the gold-mining town in Transvaal east of Johannesburg where she was born in 1923. The town was host to scattered piles of coal dust. "They had caught fire at some time or other in their years of disuse, and had continued to burn, night and day, ever since," she writes. This vision of a burning countryside symbolizes the hidden fury and violence of South Africa under apartheid, opposition to which was the major theme of Gordimer's "writing and living."

At the end of her memoir, she refers to the question of race in South Africa: "In a country where people of a color different from your own are neither in the majority nor the ruling class, you may avoid altogether certain complications that might

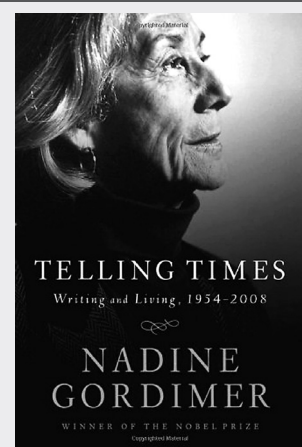
otherwise arise in the formation of your sense of human values."

She rarely writes about her personal life, and manages even fewer words about Reinhold Cassirer, her husband of almost 50 years who died in 2001. She writes that the best moment of her life was not when she won the Nobel Prize, but a party in the 1950s, soon after she and Cassirer married.

In "Party of One" she discusses a great number of American writers, speaking highly of the "truculent and unsqueamish honesty" of Saul Bellow, Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Heller while dismissing the Beats and the existentialist Norman Mailer.

She is not a feminist and yet admires Simone de Beauvoir. She dismisses Olive Schreiner for her feminism though she has a high opinion of her 1883 novel *The Story of an African Farm* and laments that the writer allowed "her creative imagination to disappear in the sands of liberal pamphleteering."

But more interesting is the calm with which she describes



Telling Times
By Nadine Gordimer,
752pp, W. W. Norton &
Company, \$39.95

the estrangement between the privileged and black Africans like an outsider. She struggles to reconcile duty with happiness, writing "There are two absolutes in my life. One is that racism is evil – human damnation in the Old Testament sense – and no compromises, as well as sacrifices, should be too great in the fight against it. The other is that a writer is a being in whose sensibility is fused ... the duality of inwardness and outside world,

and he must never be asked to sunder this union."

As a white intellectual, Gordimer found it difficult to forge a union with black writers and activists. As the daughter of Jewish immigrants, she never integrated with either the Afrikaners or the British, and yet avoided the worst of apartheid.

She talks about the obstacles that made it hard for whites "to participate in the legal and economic and spiritual liberation of blacks." In a 1977 essay, she writes, "The thing is those whites failed: failure in the ranks of those who have power is not forgiven by those without power." In the last essay in the collection Gordimer writes, "Young black readers ... confine themselves to reading African and African-American writers," and warning that "rightful pride in African literature should not create a literary ghetto."

Some of Gordimer's books remain banned at home despite wide acclaim in Britain and the US. "I am one who has always believed and still believes we shall not be rid of censorship until we are rid of apartheid."

Timezone 8 book listing

Timezone 8 is a Hong Kong-based publisher, distributor and retailer of books on contemporary art, architecture, photography and design. This week, it recommends three new titles to *Beijing Today* readers.



Aram Tanis
Blowing Smoke and Seahorses

Aram Tanis: Blowing Smoke and Seahorses

By Patty Snijders and Siobhan Tattan, 104pp, Timezone 8, \$30

Dutch photographer Aram Tanis spent six months in Beijing to unearth the alienation of city life seen in this black-and-white collection.



Miao Xiaochun: Macromania

By Miao Xiaochun, 164pp, Timezone 8, \$25

Redolent of Baroque paintings populated with choirs of cherubim and angels, the photographic world of Miao Xiaochun is one generated on a computer. His vast cityscapes confront the viewer with a smooth, perfect world of riddles and wonders. This survey offers 158 reproductions of the artist's most representative works.



Hung Liu: Great Granary

Edited by Wu Hung, 220pp, Timezone 8, \$50

This is the story of one of China's pioneering women artists. Her groundbreaking 1981 mural "Music of the Great Earth" at the Central Academy of Fine Art has been revered by a generation of artists, including Xu Bing, Sui Jianguo, Liu Xiaodong, Yu Hong, Wei Lin and Li Songsong, all of whom contribute to this monograph.

(By He Jianwei)

Professional photos on your smart phone camera

15

Trend

By Wang Yu

A camera made by a domestic label was one of the must-have luxuries of the 1980s Chinese family. That national obsession with photography has faded little over the years, as evidenced by the expensive DSLR cameras and huge lenses enthusiasts lug each weekend to the city's scenic spots.

But young people see professional camera systems as too heavy and inconvenient in a world used to the immediacy of microblogging. Many aspiring young photographers today are leaning toward camera-equipped smart phones connected to a 3G network.

Several professional photographers have held exhibitions of photos shot using cell phones. But the low-end hardware and standardized camera applications are leveling the playing field between professionals and casual users.



When Andy Zhang, the 26-year-old creative director of an advertising company, bought an iPhone4, he was hoping the smart phone would replace his camera bag.

"Each of my friends has a digital SLR camera and several lenses. Two years ago it was cool, but now when most of them go out they leave everything at home because of the weight. Usually the key moment passes by before they can assemble their camera," he says.

Zhang spent several hundred yuan on camera apps at the iTunes store. Using a 3G network connection and a microblog client, he can snap and share pictures with friends on the go.

Most popular photography programs are designed to help the iPhone mimic the effect of a classic film camera. One of the most popular is Hipstamatic, which allows a user to shoot square photos to which it applies a number of software filters to simulate the look of medium-format film. Users can buy additional filters, films and flashes to extend the software.

According to the distributing company Synthetic, the application is based on the Hipstamatic 100, a cheap plastic analog camera that flopped in the early 1980s. But while the plastic edition sold a mere 200 units, its iPhone-powered son has sold more than 1.4 million copies. Damon Winter, a photographer for the *New York Times*, used it last year to illustrate a front page story about the war in Afghanistan.

Traditional publishing has helped spread the name of Hipstamatic and similar apps that aim to drag the romance of film into the digital scene. But the software is a bestseller in the App Store more for its social networking features than its filters.

By browsing the popular photos that the Instagram server filters, users can "follow" others, make comments and share the photo on Twitter or Facebook. The application also features a location-based service that allows users to mark where they are when uploading a photo. A Japanese press house has even published a guide book to Instagram.

The broad success has led to a few iPhone photography exhibitions organized by professional artists.

In January, the photographer couple Ye Zi and Li Duyu displayed 100 photos in KATO studio at 22 International Art Plaza. The photos were taken during a year of shooting with an iPhone 3GS. The photographers said they hoped the exhibition would finally hammer home the message that good photographs depend on the photographer, not his camera.

Many amateurs think worthwhile photographs can only be taken in Tibet or the Huangshan range. "With a simple cell phone you can take pictures everywhere and save the setup time to capture great moments," Li says.

The couple said young students' attitudes toward life are changing with the advent of accessible photography.

"Though our exhibition we also want people to know that life can be easier. Camera manufacturers are constantly churning out upgrades that cost money, leading a lot of fans to chase the gear rather than hone their craft. We hope the people who see our exhibition can realize photographic opportunities come all the time in daily life," Ye says.

The couple is collecting photos from other iPhone users for their next exhibition in April.



Photos by Song Nannan



In January, the photographer couple Ye Zi and Li Duyu displayed 100 photos in KATO studio at 22 International Art Plaza.

Photo Provided by KATO



Must-have camera Apps Camera+

This program is made for users who prefer to shoot first and edit later. When taking a photo, there is a 3x3 grid to help line up the shot. A stabilizer is also available to delay the shot until the camera is still enough. It's very useful for low-light situations and long zooms.

The Lightbox section allows users to view and edit their photos by cropping and applying effects. "Retro" is one of the many instant effects, allowing users to adjust lighting and resize their photos.

Price: \$ 1.99



100 Cameras in 1

There are hundreds of camera packages sold in the iTunes store, and most favor vintage photography. It's a smart move, since many of the analog photo effects help hide the weaknesses inherent in low-resolution shots from mobile phones.

But 100 Cameras in 1 does more.

It uses texture blending as an effect, adding graphical elements to emulate the look of recycled paper and expired chemicals giving even ordinary photos an exotic look. The app also allows the user to mix and combine effects for an original look.

Price: \$2



Pudding Camera

This Korean program simulates some classic toy camera types like the 4-lens and the fisheye. Users can choose from eight kinds of film for each camera. The effects are good enough if you are looking for something different. Unfortunately, all the options are in Korean. Still, it's hard to fault an otherwise excellent program that is distributed for free.

Price: free

New outdoor fashion

By Annie Wei

Beijing Today checked out some products that'll get you ready for outdoor activities this spring.

Moisturize your skin

Beijing's spring is extra dry and windy. You need high-moisture products to protect your skin when you are out. The body shop is known for herbal ingredients and promoting community fair trade. Although the brand is not operating in China, its latest products are on Taobao.

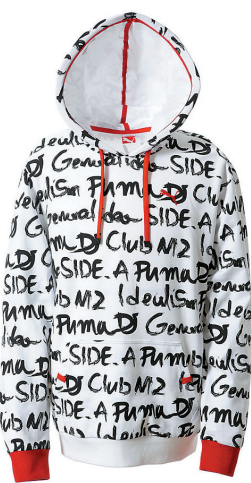
Web site: jqnh.taobao.com



The Body Shop's new shiso products, starting from 168 yuan

Photo provided by The Body Shop

Puma blazing new trend



By Felix Hu

Puma may not be known for its fancy designs, but it is currently working with top South Korean designer Bumsuk Choi to produce a collection of shoes suitable for both the gym and the nightclub.

Choi has named the series "Puma Disc Blaze," with shoes starting at 499 yuan. He said it was inspired by the South Korean rock band Deulgukhwa.

"I tried to combine my bold ideas into Puma's sportswear. I used giant English letters, numbers and prints on jackets, tracksuits and running shoes, in order to express musical beats," Choi said.

"For young people, music and fashion are the best ways to communicate. It's the world."

Choi was the youngest designer to show his works at 2004 Seoul Fashion Week. He has his own label, General Idea, which has become one of the most popular street fashion brands in Asia. In 2009, he went to New York Fashion Week, becoming the first South Korean male fashion designer to do so.

Puma's Asian-Pacific sales manager, Christoph Peter Isenbuerger, said Choi's creations "close the distance between Puma and young consumers."

Puma

Where: 255 Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District
Open: 10 am - 8 pm
Tel: 8518 6404



Puma jumper, 399 yuan



Puma shoes, 499 yuan

Photos provided by Puma

Embracing Indian fashion

By Felix Hu

To capitalize on the increasing popularity of Indian fashion, a French luxury label has reproduced one of its best-selling collections, Le Pliage, based on an Indian fairy tale.

The story is about how Krishna brought the Raat Ki Rani tree to earth. Two of his wives fought because both of them wanted it, and they were jealous of one another. The clever god planted the tree in the garden of one wife but in such a way so that the flowers of the trees hung over into the other wife's courtyard. The conflict was thus resolved.



Key chain, 800 yuan

Le Pliage features a series of white bags (starting from 1,200 yuan) that all have bright embroidery based on the story. The patterns are in the shape of trees, with colorful birds.

Two resin lucky charms add more color to this collection: a pink hummingbird and a blue parrot that can attach to keys or bags.

Longchamp specializes in good craftsmanship, including luggage, handbags and accessories.

Longchamp

Where: APM Plaza, 138 Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District
Open: 10 am - 10 pm
Tel: 6512 4628



Longchamp white bag, 1,200 to 1,500 yuan

Photos provided by Longchamp

New restaurants for natural ingredients

By Annie Wei

Restaurants were packed last weekend as Beijingers came back from the holiday desperate to take advantage of the mild temperatures.

Beijing Today joined merry diners everywhere and checked out Nasca Café's new brand at Sanlitun South Road, a fresh pomegranate juice store at The Village North and a fancy Chinese restaurant near Jianguomen known for wooing food editors.

The only place to serve Manchurian feasts

By Chu Meng

Many people used to think "Najia Xiaoguan" literally meant "that little place." But "Na" is actually a Manchu surname, and Najia is the only place that serves authentic Manchurian cuisine.

The Manchus, who toppled the Ming and established the Qing Dynasty (1636 – 1912), enjoyed relative prosperity while in power. Manchurian cuisine, as a result, flourished.

This Manchurian restaurant delivers consistently delicious and unique food in a classy and traditional Chinese teahouse style at accessible prices. The place is perfect for catching up with close friends or business partners.

The menu has been simplified from the famous Man Han Imperial Feast, which consisted of 108 unique dishes derived from Manchu and Han

flavors, but still has enough variety to keep customers coming back. The names of the dishes are carved on small sticks that come on two wooden trays.

Crispy fried prawns are an indispensable house special at 38 yuan. The prawns are frozen within 30 minutes of being taken out of seawater, ensuring they taste tender and the shells become transparent after frying.

Because the Manchus loved hunting, deer meat became a favorite among the people. The "Deer Stew in Imperial Pot," from 68 to 98 yuan, is thick and good to try. At Najia, this dish is made from thick, meaty soup that's been slow-cooked for at least 18 hours. The flavor of deer meat is richer than beef but less tender.

The house's sweet and sour plum juice with honey and

maple syrup is great for whetting appetites.

Other typical Manchu dishes include the appetizers Eight Banner eggplant (58 yuan), rice flavor fried chicken with walnut (48 yuan) and purple yam with sweet osmanthus sauce (32 yuan).

An English menu is available. Reservations should be made three to four days in advance.

Najia Xiaoguan Restaurant

Where: Yong'an Xili, South of Xinhua Insurance Building, Jianguomen Wai Dajie, Chaoyang District

Open: 11:30 am – 9:30 pm

Where: No.29, Xiangshan Lu, Haidian District

Open: 11:30 am – 9:30 pm

Tel: 8259 8588

Cafe offers wide New Zealand selection

By Annie Wei

Nasca Café, a popular small dining place for expats in Maizidian recently opened a location at Sanlitun South.

The décor remains the same: a light and airy atmosphere, a computer for diners to check email and piles of magazines and books.

The food remains good, too. "Most of our cheeses, mutton, shrimp and fish are imported from New Zealand," Liu Wei, the cafe's owner, said, explaining why the cafe's tagline reads "truly gourmet New Zealand."

The restaurant has a wide range of gourmet pizzas, sand-

wiches, salads, pasta, burgers, snacks, soups, sweets and coffee. A New Zealand Natural ice cream mainly found in five-star hotels (18 yuan for a scoop) will soon be available in March, Liu said.

Regulars come for the pizzas, particularly spicy Mexican Passion (46 yuan for small, 92 yuan for large), flavored with chili and tomato sauce; Caribbean (48 yuan / 96 yuan) with tuna, mushroom, tomato and mayo; and Harbor's Fiesta (55 yuan / 109 yuan) topped with prawns, squid, scallops, tomato and seafood sauce.

Vegetarians can try the New

Green-views (59 yuan / 116 yuan) with Italian sun-dried tomatoes, cashews, mushroom, avocado, onions, spinach and Camembert cheese.

For fun, we recommend the pizza creator (48 yuan / 98 yuan): choose up to eight toppings with a wide selection of meat and vegetables including prawn, squid, Italian anchovies, capsicum and blue cheese.

Its popular pastas are spaghetti bolognese (32 yuan), chicken mushroom fettuccini (36 yuan) and seafood pasta (46 yuan). People who love barbecue should try the BBQ King Ribs (42 yuan / 98 yuan), marinated meaty ribs roasted with

savory smoky BBQ sauce, with choice of vegetables, steamed rice or potato wedges.

"Our special service is home delivery," Liu said. Orders of at least 50 yuan enjoy free delivery; otherwise, delivery costs extra, depending on the distance.

Nasca Café

Where: 109, 1 Baijiazhuang Lu, Sanlitun Nan, Chaoyang District

Open: 10 am – 11 pm

Tel: 5967 0966

Where: 105B, 38 Zaoying Bei Li, Maizidian, Chaoyang District

Open: 10 am – 11 pm

Tel: 6592 4537



Pizza starting from 46 yuan and hamburger from 38 yuan

Photo provided by Nasca Café

Fresh pomegranate and grape juice

By Annie Wei

Many people were made aware of Früt Actually through the microblog of BNC owner and media guru Hong Huang, who recommended this place in Sanlitun Village North.

The best drinks are its freshly squeezed pomegranate and grape juice (33 yuan for small and 39 yuan for large). The store buys fresh pomegranates and peels them every day. The juicy comes out extraordinarily sweet and refreshing. The pleasant surprise is the store adds no extra sugar. "The secret lies in quality pomegranates," owner Qin Wusheng said. He sources a good fruit supplier to ensure the juice's quality.

Früt Actually

Where: NLG41, B1, The Village North, 19 Sanlitun Lu, Chaoyang District

Open: 11 am – 8 pm

Tel: 6415 8385

Pomegranate juice, 33 yuan for small and 39 yuan for large

Photo provided by Qin Wusheng



Najia branch at Jianguo venue

Photos provided by Zhou Wei

Beef ribs, 98 yuan

Pebbles at the end of a journey

By Zhang Dongya

Barbara Anchisi, who traveled from Italy to China gathering pebbles, walked the length of her exhibition at Yishu 8 Gallery, and upon the end said, "This is the end of a journey."

The 20 works on display, featuring pebbles with ink on Chinese paper, indeed mark a journey of sorts.

"I picked up the pebbles in Italy and took them to China, like 2 or 3 kilograms with me. I painted on Chinese paper with Chinese ink and then I took them back and exhibited them in Italy," Anchisi said. "Now they're in China – a full circle."

Born in Turin, Anchisi has been in China for 15 years. She started the "pebble journey" two and a half years ago.

"I have a beautiful summer house on the beach in Italy dotted by pebbles," she said. "When I walk along the beach, I keep thinking of my art, and I really wanted to make an exhibition in both Italy and China. I love both these two places."

In Italy, Anchisi exhibited the pebbles at a church in the village beside the beach last summer.

Anchisi uses Chinese brushstrokes in the pieces. She said

she learned calligraphy when she arrived in China in 1996.

"If you want to paint bamboo you have to be in a certain mood, and if you want to paint a flower, you have to channel different emotions altogether – that is the hardest part," she said.

The artist also used the colors of China and Italy to link the two countries together. "This red is found in China – for example in a restaurant – and it is also the same color you would find for a house in a specific village in Italy," she said.

Anchisi now teaches young kids art at an international school in Beijing. "Maybe because I am teaching art, I always have new ideas from working with children," she said.

Her philosophy is to experiment and keep trying new things.

"I'm not going to paint the pebbles anymore," she said. "I want to change, and I'm going to move on and try something different."

Pebbles in My Pocket

Where: Yishu 8 Gallery, Cable 8 Factory, 8 Langjiayuan, Jianguo Lu, Chaoyang District

When: Until March 21, daily except Sunday, 10 am – 6:30 pm

Admission: Free
Tel: 6581 9058



5 Friday, February 25

Movie Russian Ark (2002)

This Russian historical drama is about an unnamed narrator, voiced by the director, going through the Russian State Heritage Museum in Saint Petersburg. In each room, he encounters real and fictional people from various time periods in the city's 300-year history.

Where: China Film Archive, 3 Wenhuiyuan Lu, Haidian District

When: 7 pm
Admission: 20 yuan
Tel: 8601 6860

Nightlife

Shinichi Osawa

Having debuted in the music scene in 1993 as leader of the band Mondo Grosso, Osawa is king of indie dance and has been voted one of the most popular DJs in Japan.

Where: Yugongyishan, 3-2 Zhangzizhong Lu, Dongcheng District

When: 10 pm
Admission: 80 yuan advance purchase, 100 yuan at the door
Tel: 6404 2711

Exhibition

Chen Guangwu Solo Exhibition

Chen uses traditional Chinese media, such as brush, ink and paper, to create abstract works.

Where: Alexander Ochs Galleries, 255 Caochangdi Village, Chaoyang District

When: Until March 26, daily except Monday, 11 am – 6 pm
Admission: Free
Tel: 8456 2054



Sunday, February 27

Exhibition 798 Photo Gallery Historical Retrospective Part I

This exhibition displays photos from the Cultural Revolution to the 1980s.

Where: 798 Photo Gallery, 798 Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

When: Until March 31, daily except Monday, 11 am – 6 pm
Admission: Free
Tel: 6438 1784



Movie Rebellion of the Body (1968) and Story of Smallpox (1972)

The two films document Japanese Butoh, a form of stylized avant-garde dance developed by pioneering choreographer and cultural icon Tatsumi Hijikata.

Where: Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA), 798 Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District
When: 4 pm

Admission: 15 yuan, 10 yuan for students
Tel: 8459 9269

Nightlife

China 5

With only a guitarist and drummer, this two-man rock band is set to tour 100 cities in 2011, with Beijing as its first destination.

Where: D-22, 242 Chengfu Lu, Haidian District
When: 9 pm
Admission: free
Tel: 6265 3177

6 Saturday, February 26

Exhibition Fabrique en Chine

The theme of this group exhibition is

"domestic products," advocating Chinese contemporary art as a common international language.

Where: Beyond Art Space, 798 Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

When: Until March 27, daily except Monday, 11 am – 6 pm

Admission: Free
Tel: 5978 9561



Movie

My Fancy High Heels (2010) and Fairytale Gone (2010)

The first documentary is about Taiwanese shoemakers; the second is about how modernization is changing a Bai ethnic village.

Where: Broadway Cinematheque, 2/F Building 4, north section of Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), 1 Xiangheyuan Lu, Dongcheng District

When: 7 pm
Admission: Free
Tel: 8438 8258 ext. 8008

Nightlife

A Tribute to The Rolling Stones

Five rock bands – Los Crasher, Jacky Danny, The Flying Mantas, Out of Control and Maggie Who – pay tribute to The Rolling Stones.

Where: Mao Livehouse, 111 Gulou Dong Dajie, Dongcheng District
When: 8:30 pm
Admission: 50 yuan advance purchase, 60 yuan at the door
Tel: 6402 5080

Upcoming

Exhibition

Omni-dimensional design in China
Through multiple disciplines, including architecture, space design, product design, graphic design, art and social research, this exhibition investigates the flow of energy through China.

Where: Beijing Center for the Arts, 23, Qianmen Dongdajie, Dongcheng District

When: March 12 – April 15, 10 am – 8 pm
Admission: free
Tel: 6559 8008

Stage in March

Concert

Peter Vinograd Piano Recital

Where: Beijing Concert Hall, 1 Bei Xinhua Jie, Xicheng District

When: March 4, 7:30 pm
Admission: 50-380 yuan
Tel: 5166 1145

Katie Targett-Adams & Irish Band Ciorras

Where: Forbidden City Concert Hall (inside Zhongshan Park), 18 Zhaodengyu Lu, Xicheng District

When: March 18, 7:30 pm
Admission: 30-380 yuan
Tel: 6417 7845

Nikolaj Znaider and Staatskapelle Dresden

Where: Concert Hall of the National Center for the Performing Arts, 2 Xi Chang'an Jie, Xicheng District

When: March 26-27, 7:30 pm
Admission: 200-980 yuan
Tel: 6655 0000

Dance

Raise the Red Lantern

Where: Opera House of the National Center for the Performing Arts, 2 Xi Chang'an Jie, Xicheng District

When: March 13-14, 7:30 pm
Admission: 100-500 yuan
Tel: 6655 0000

Drama

The Accidental Death of An Anarchist

Where: Fengchao Theater, 200 meters east of Oriental Ginza, 12 Shizipo, Dongzhimen Wai Dajie, Dongcheng District

When: March 9-20, 7:30 pm
Admission: 50-200 yuan
Tel: 5165 1914

Much Ado About Nothing

Where: Nine Theater, Chaoyang Culture Center, 17 Jintai Li, Chaoyang District

When: March 25-26, 7:30 pm
Admission: 60-380 yuan
Tel: 6551 6930 / 6906

Goddess of Luo River

Where: Poly Theater, 14 Dongzhimen Nan Dajie, Dongcheng District

When: February 12-14, 7:30 pm
Admission: 80-380 yuan
Tel: 6551 8058

Opera

Kunqu: The Story of the Jade Hairpin

Where: Multi-functional Theater of the National Center for the Performing Arts, 2 Xi Chang'an Jie, Xicheng District

When: March 5, 7:30 pm
Admission: 150 yuan
Tel: 6655 0000

(By He Jianwei)

Beware of unhealthy health foods

By Chu Meng

Alcohol-free drinks, low-sodium salts, low-fat cakes and sugar-free foods seem like lifesavers for gluttons. These miraculous foods and beverages can ensure drivers a safe trip home after their class reunions and give a safe but tasty meal to people with high blood pressure.

But for many, these curiously "healthy" foods are turning out to be far less healthy and safe than we would like to believe.

Low sodium salt is salt

Classic case:

Zong Xiuhua, a 67-year-old Beijinger, has a 20-year history of high blood pressure. When the problem was first diagnosed, she gave up her career as a master chef and began cooking her own meals at home using little salt.

"I hate to eat such bland dishes. Few can really understand the disgusting flavor involved in eating low or no-salt dishes," she said, lamenting her life's lack of favorite dishes like kung pao chicken.

Months earlier, her doctor recommended she try using low-sodium salt, which first became available in Chinese supermarket at the end of last year.

However, after switching to low-sodium salt for two weeks, her blood pressure returned to a dangerously high level.

What it really is:

Low-sodium salt has 66 percent less sodium than common table salt. These sodium-replacement salts taste the same as normal table salt but use potassium as a key ingredient. In fact, they should help lower blood pressure because of the potassium.

"If people like Zong really cannot live without the taste of salt, then it may be worth trying a low-sodium alternative," said Wang Wen, chief secretary of the China Blood Pressure Association.

He said that Chinese people love salt, and it can be found in copious amounts in all Chinese cuisine. But eating too much sodium has been linked to elevated blood pressure and early-onset heart disease.

Wang suggested eating no more than 3 grams of common salt or 6 grams of low-sodium salt would prevent 20,000 deaths by stroke or heart attack each year. "However, most people in China eat 20 grams of salt on an average day," he said.

The reality:

Unfortunately, not everyone should use low-sodium salts, and chefs cannot be careless with its use just because it says "low-sodium."

"Low-sodium salt is salt. It contains 66 percent less sodium, but that vacancy is replaced by potassium. Potassium has similar chemical characteristics with sodium once inside the human body. Its impact is only slightly more moderate," Wang said.

He said a substantial increase in potassium consumption could be dangerous for people with kidney disease or who are taking certain blood pressure medications.



CFP Photo

Three cups of alcohol-free drinks still too much

Classic case:

During Spring Festival, the Beijing Municipal Public Security Bureau cracked down on drunk drivers with more force than ever before. Drivers who drank even a mouthful of beer were ticked and fined when caught.

Unfortunately for Han Meng, 28, "alcohol-free" on the label does not translate into "no alcohol."

"The drinks I had were imported from Australia and expensive. I had never seen them before in Beijing's supermarkets or restaurants. I bought some for my father-in-law and drank with him at the festival dinner," he said after failing a breathalyzer test.

What it really is:

Alcohol-free beers and wines are those which have had the alcohol extracted from them, leaving behind other elements.

Though research suggests that moderate amounts of red wine can be beneficial to one's health, the drink is generally off limits to drivers, patients under medical treatment, athletes and fitness enthusiasts in training, expectant and nursing mothers and recovering alcoholics.

Alcohol-free beverages

are marketed to this group as a safe alternative.

The reality:

France, the UK and Australia consider a beverage to be "alcohol-free" when it contains 0.5 percent alcohol or less. "Low-alcohol" wines can contain as much as 1.2 percent alcohol.

Despite the name, these drinks cannot be consumed so carelessly. And to put things in perspective, a regular beer contains 2.2 to 4.5 percent alcohol.

In China, a driver whose blood alcohol content is more than 20 and less than 80 milligrams per 100 milliliters will be fined for driving after drinking. Anything higher merits a full-blown drunk driving penalty.

The Public Security Bureau tested an alcohol-free wine and found that two glasses were enough to elevate one police officer's blood alcohol content to 15 milligrams. A third glass pushed it past 34 milligrams.

Alcohol-free wines are only safe from the breathalyzer when fewer than two glasses are consumed. Athletes and patients with a compromised liver would be well advised to skip the alcohol-free drinks completely.

Low-fat ice cream a trap for weight-watchers

Classic case:

Bao Lei, a 26-year-old weight-loss fanatic, has been following a diet that restricts carbohydrates since meeting her first boyfriend in high school. But like most women, she can't fight her sugar cravings forever.

When shopping for desserts at the supermarket or ordering at a restaurant, she always chooses low-fat products like fruit yogurt, skimmed milk, low-fat ice cream and low-fat salad dressing.

However, her weekly diet journal revealed she was consuming more calories on days when she ate low-fat ice cream or skimmed milk.

What it really is:

Low-fat or fat-free foods are seen most often in dairy products. These extract 95 to 100 percent of the fat from the raw milk before processing. Fat-free foods have been popular since the rise of boney pop icons on TV and magazines.

In China, low-fat food has become popular for another reason: Chinese people have been getting fat even faster than they have been getting rich.

The reality:

Sometimes, low-fat foods are a bear trap.

Fan Zhihong, a nutritionist

and professor at China Agricultural University, said many low-fat desserts and dairy products are even more calorie-dense than normal versions.

The fats in meats and dairy products and dishes are one of the most important elements involved in taste. Nothing can compete with fat when it comes to flavor.

In order to make low-fat products sell, food makers have to pump up their carbohydrates to replace lost fats, adding sugar-processed candy, fruit jams and artificial seasonings to even something as simple as milk, Fan said.

"The end result ends up being the exact opposite of what dieters want. Sugar, diced pudding, processed candy, fruit jam and artificial seasonings can provide 50 to 150 percent more calories than a bottle of common yogurt," she said.

A low-fat diet will not lower cholesterol significantly or help people lose weight unless it causes people to reduce their total caloric intake.

"If you eat several cups of non-fat, non-sugared ice cream or yogurt, you will take in extra calories and your liver will convert all these extra calories to fat, regardless of their origin," Fan said.

An ancient gathering in western Beijing

By Zhang Dongya

In Mentougou in western Beijing are two ancient villages – Qianjuntai and Zhuanghu – where rituals performed nearly a thousand years ago still exist.

The most famous ritual is the Gufanhui, or Ancient Streamer Pageant, held on the 15th and 16th days of the Chinese lunar calendar.

This year, the pageant was last Thursday and Friday, attended by an unexpectedly large crowd of 700 people.

With more young people getting involved, these folk customs could be seeing a renaissance.



Two streamers with images of Zhang Fei and Guan Yu, heroes from the Three Kingdoms Period, lead the parade.

Photos by Dashan

Qianjuntai, or Thousand-Soldier Station, was once as its name implies: headquarters for the army. It's said that the village was built as early as the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

Two hundred households currently call the village home. Zhuanghu, a smaller village, is on its east side. Together, these two villages hold the Ancient Streamer Pageant – traditionally an event to praise the gods – every year.

Li Changshan, a native of Mentougou and photography enthusiast, has participated in several pageants, even though it takes him an hour by bus to get to these villages.

In the Ancient Streamer Pageant, the streamer is the leading role. There are two major streamers in the festival: a yellow one and a red one, with images of Zhang Fei and Guan Yu, heroes from the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280). The streamers are about six meters long and one meter wide. It usually takes a dozen villagers several days to make these.

Behind the streamers follow dozens of people waving pennants and flags with Chinese characters, all tailored and embroidered by

locals. These can be used for several years before they have to be replaced.

The Pageant starts at 3 pm. Villagers wear makeup and adorn themselves in colorful ancient costumes. The parade starts on the 15th day of the first lunar month at a weather-beaten ancient temple in Zhuanghu Village – where people hang streamers and flags – and makes its way to Qianjuntai.

"It has become more crowded these years, with villagers in other villages in Mentougou and even residents in the city coming around," Li said.

A musical troupe playing wind and percussion instruments, like gongs and cymbals, accompanies the marchers. These performers are amateurs with day jobs; the youngest musician is 40 years old.

Ancient streamer music originated from a sacrifice ritual performed during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) and Warring States Period (475-221 BC). Some of the songs are musical interpretations of tales told by Confucius, who lived during the Spring and Autumn Period. They are dubbed "living fossils" among ancient Chinese music.

Continued on page 21...



A musical troupe plays wind and percussion instruments while accompanying the marchers.

CFP Photo



Villagers parade from Zhuanghu to Qianjuntai on the first day and back the next day.



The pageant attracts crowded visitors from neighboring villages and outside towns.



Villagers perform dragon and lion dances, as well as yangko, a traditional northern folk dance.



The pageant features ancient streamer music dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period.

...continued from page 20

Beginning in 1983, the local government began conducting research on ancient streamer music in Mentougou. Scores have been collected into a book called *Folk Music*, which is sold in Mentougou.

Twenty years ago, dozens of people could play ancient streamer music written in gongche, an ancient music notation using characters to represent musical notes. Unfortunately, only two or three people are able to do this today.

At Zhuanghu, there is a small office for people to practice the music with instruments laid out on a big round table, with musical scores hanging on the wall.

A 30-minute walk separates the villages. At Qianjuntai, a ritual is held to receive the Zhuanghu marchers, who represent ancient soldiers. People from the two villages mingle and set off firecrackers to the beat of drums, the sounds of which echo off the surrounding mountains. They parade around the village first and then to the west side of Qianjuntai, where people will gather at the Temple of Guan Yu to worship the god of fortune.

"I seldom follow the troop to the temple, since it is always 6 or 7 in the evening and dark in the winter," Li said.

The next day, the "troops" will march from Qianjuntai back to Zhuanghu. A large gong starts the people off, and a crowd, once again, will follow.

The ancient temple in Zhuanghu Village is in bad condition: the side halls which lodged monks in the past have almost collapsed. Villagers are preparing to collect money to restore the temple.

The Ancient Streamer Pageant in Mentougou was a major to pray event to the gods and sing for the gods in the past. The pageant has taken on more of a carnival feel in modern times. Young people have been participating more often; they are particularly helpful in holding up the heavy flagstaves.

"Many young villagers learned the unique technique," Li said. "They are now in good enough shape to wave the streamers and flags."

They also perform dragon and lion dances, as well as yangko dances, which is a traditional northern folk dance. Children dressed in colorful costumes hold small flags and are involved as well.

"The performance is very impressive," Li said. "With authentic local customs, it's rare to see a festival that's been so well-preserved in Beijing."

Getting to Qianjuntai Village: Take Subway Line 1 to Pingguoyuan Station and come out of Exit A. Take bus 112, 959, 977 to the Shui-zha stop and transfer to 929 to Qianjuntai.

Or drive on Fushi Lu from West Fifth Ring Road and drive along Jinding Nan Lu, State Highway 109 and Xia'an Lu to Muchengjian Lu.



Most villagers participate in the event; children, who can hold the streamers, never miss it.

Photos by Dashan

Hotel



Kempinski best brand of 2011

Europe's oldest hotel group won the Best Brands award in the category of Best Service Provider. The luxury hotel group was ranked No. 1, followed by Germany's Direktbank ING DiBa and Lufthansa. Kempinski accepted its award at a lavish gala held in Munich last night.

"During the survey, Kempinski stood out in all areas relating to service," said Sigfried Hög, managing director of GfK, a member of the awarding body. "The unique and decentralized nature of Kempinski's strategy was recognized by those surveyed, and that makes all the difference."

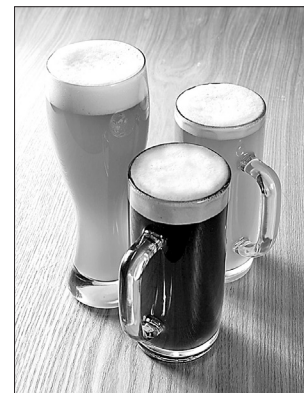
"This recognition of our service quality by Best Brands makes us very proud. Our standard for honest hospitality is service with a heartfelt smile, and this doesn't go unnoticed," said Reto Wittwer, Kempinski's president and CEO. "Caring for each guest is what makes Kempinski special. Our objective is to provide customized service to each individual guest, not only fulfilling

their wishes, but exceeding their expectations. Through this, we want them to experience moments that will never be forgotten. Having these efforts recognized by our guests makes this award an even greater honor to us."

Over the years, Kempinski has developed an innovative and highly respected collection of luxury properties. Each offers superior standards of service combined with a unique style. In China, Kempinski is continuing to expand and develop its portfolio. It currently manages nine properties in the country with 12 more under construction.

Kempinski enjoys high brand awareness as a luxury hotel operator with exceptional products in key destinations including Beijing, Dalian, Shenyang, Xi'an, Yinchuan, Suzhou, Wuxi, Chengdu and Shenzhen. In 2011, there will be openings in Huizhou, Guiyang, Shanghai and Haitang Bay, Hainan Province.

Dining



Hoppy Hour brews

Come in any day between 5 and 8 pm for buy-one-get-one-free house beers during Hoppy Hour.

Where: Hopfenstube, Crowne Plaza, Beijing Chaoyang U-Town, 3 Sanfeng Bei Li, south of Prime Tower, Chaoyang District

When: 5-8 pm, Until March 31

Tel: 5909 6683

A journey of Portuguese cuisine

Discover delicate aromas from the deep blue sea presented the Portuguese way.

Where: Vasco's, 5F Hilton Beijing Wangfujing, 8 Wangfujing Dong Dajie, Dongcheng District

When: lunch buffet 11:30 am - 2:30 pm (excluding Sundays); dinner buffet 5:30 - 9:30 pm

Cost: 268 yuan (15 percent gratuity), includes free soft drinks, juice, coffee or tea.

Tel: 5812 8888 ext. 8411 for reservation

Email: wangfujing@hilton.com

Airline



Free upgrade from Club World to First with British Airways

Effective immediately and until the end of March 2011, customers booking British Airways' award-winning Club World business class can enjoy the ultimate luxury travel experience through a free upgrade to first class on one leg of their journey to and from Europe.

Customers choosing to take advantage of the free upgrade must book their ticket before March 31 and travel before August 31. There is no limit to the number of upgrades customers can receive up to March 31, subject to availability.

"In our continued commitment to providing customers with added benefits and the best travel experience, we are pleased to bring an exceptional opportunity for customers to upgrade and enjoy this quintessential first class travel experience," said Kevin McQuillan, British Airways' regional general manager, East Asia. "For more than 30 years, we have been committed to providing travelers between China and Europe outstanding value for their money, and this exceptional offer is another example of our dedication to our Club World customers."

Air China Phoenix Miles partnership bonus for Swire Hotels guests

Swire Hotels and Air China are pleased to announce an agreement that welcomes the hotel group as the latest partner of Phoenix Miles.

Starting January 1, Phoenix Miles members will be able to earn 800 miles for every hotel stay at The Upper House and EAST, Hong Kong and The Opposite House, Beijing.

The strategic partnership will provide Phoenix Miles members with more high-end services and lucrative mileage accumulation opportunities.

The Opposite House, an intriguing urban hotel opened in Beijing in 2008, was followed by The Upper House, opened in 2009 above Pacific place in Hong Kong. Both have received much praise

from local and international guests and media. Cafe Gray Deluxe from The Upper House was recently awarded a Michelin star in the 2011 Michelin Guide Hong Kong and Macau.

Future properties from Swire Hotels will include EAST, Beijing, a 369-room lifestyle business hotel located at Jiang Tai in Beijing's Chaoyang district between the Fourth and Fifth Ring Road and within INDIGO, a joint venture by Swire Properties Limited and Sino-Ocean Land Holdings. The location is home to some of the most prestigious local and multinational corporations, making it an ideal stopover for business travelers.

Air Mauritius announces flights to China

Air Mauritius announced today it will begin flights to Shanghai from early July. Shanghai will be the 25th destination of the national airline and it's 4th in East Asia. Air Mauritius already flies to Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

The flight will go through Kuala Lumpur with connections to Reunion, Antananarivo and South Africa.

Shanghai is one of the most populous cities in China and is a center of finance and trade. Shanghai is also a popular tourist destination with historical landmarks. Last year's World Expo attracted a record 73 million visitors to the city.

"We are delighted to announce our direct operations to Shanghai and thereby pave the way for closer ties between China and Mauritius. This flight is a first step in our devel-



opment in one of the world's fastest growing economies and we hope that our tourism partners will find new opportunities for growth as we diversify our tourism markets and as we build up our capacity to East Asia from six weekly frequencies to a daily," Andre Viljoen, the airline's acting CEO, said.

(By Jackie Zhang)

Chinglish story

This column focuses on Chinglish mistakes in our daily life. If you have any experiences to share, send them to Wang Yu at wangyu2008@ynet.com.

I'm not really a pickup artist

By Wang Yu

Learning how to approach girls is a rite of passage for many guys, and as one of my friends recently learned, it's a skill that must be relearned when entering a different culture.

Tony is a friend of mine from Los Angeles. People say he's cute, which I suppose is true enough: he works as a part-time model for some magazines. Sometimes we go to nightclubs together and people take him for a playboy at first glance.

But despite that – or because of it – he's been unsuccessful with Chinese women.

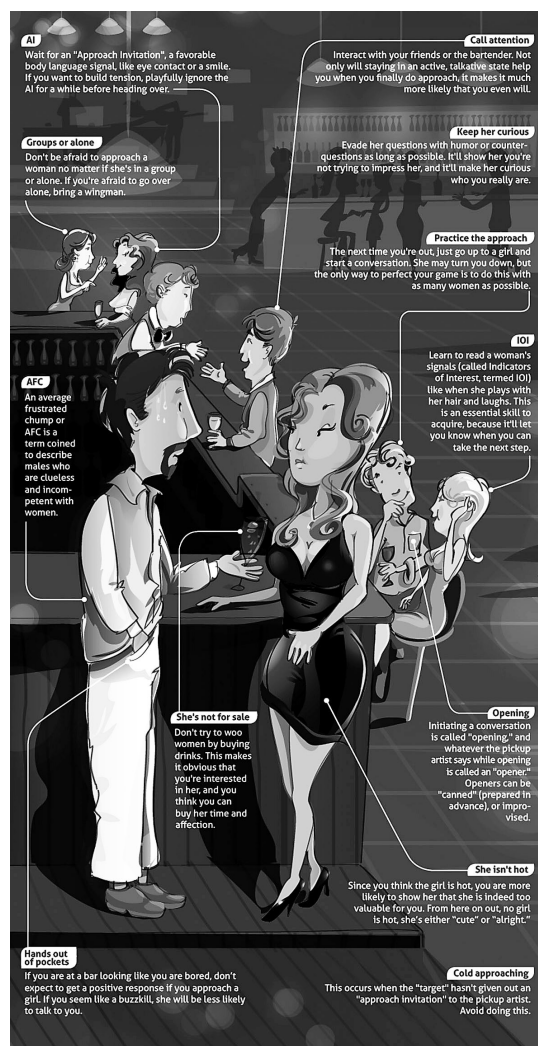
"Some girls are too shy to go out with foreigners," he keeps telling me. He chats with some Chinese girls from work, but few of them want to even go out for a cup of coffee with him. Tony thinks it's because they're not confident in their English and afraid they'll embarrass themselves.

That's partly true, but it doesn't explain Tony's dismal record even at nightclubs. Girls on the dance floor seldom dance with expats. No matter how hard Tony tries, girls show no interest in him.

Things all changed one day when he met Agnes at an exhibition.

I'm not a fan of contemporary art, so the show was boring to me. I felt that it was for Tony, as well. But when we were about to leave, Agnes – an art agent I know from work – showed up.

Agnes is a pretty young woman who attended university in the UK for five



years. She is a typical *haigui* – a young person who returns from abroad with a degree. She cares about politics and has problems fitting in with the local

community. But a girl like her is utterly irresistible because of her elegance and pride.

Tony was interested from the get-go.

I introduced Agnes to Tony, and it seemed that she liked him, too. Finally, Tony's curse would be broken, I thought.

Agnes asked me lots of questions about Tony. I told her he was a popular young man and many girls liked him. I told her this thinking she'd be more interested if she thought he was a catch.

"He's a pickup artist," I said.

Later I discovered the two were dating.

The last time I bumped into Tony was at a rock show a few weeks ago. He was happy with his relationship, but something was bugging him: at the beginning, Agnes had asked him what kind of art he does.

"What did you say to her? I'm sure I didn't tell her I was an artist," he said.

"Ah, nothing special, just that you were a pickup artist," I replied.

Obviously, Agnes misunderstood the phrase. A "pickup artist" is someone good at picking up girls and hanging out with them, and has nothing to do with her line of work in art.

"That's it!" Tony exclaimed. "Thank God she didn't know what that meant. You almost ruined my luck!"

I thought about this. Sure, it could've turned out badly, but now the two are now happy together. Ah, how whimsical love can be sometimes.

Blacklist

This is a column of words or phrases commonly misused by Chinese speakers. If you're planning to be an English teacher, reporter or employee of a multinational company, then watch out for this page each week

1. They don't see media a burden.

Professor Zhu Shida (ZS): Here, for idiomatic sake, I think it is necessary to use the phrase "to see something as": They don't see media as a burden. Similarly, we may say: They see their instructor as their father. They see this event as a major breakthrough.

Terry Boyd-Zhang (TBZ): "Media" itself is a tricky word. Remember that it is plural, and the singular form is "medium." When a person talks about newspapers, radio, TV and such, it is almost always used in the plural; it seems we seldom speak of one form on its own.

2. China has produced that precision machine. It shows the growth of nation's strength.

ZS: The problem lies with the usage of the definite article, the part that is most difficult in the study of English grammar. As you talk about something that is produced by China, obviously you are referring to China by saying "nation's strength." So, it must have a definite article before "nation" that definitely denotes China. So, the right way to say it should be: China has produced that precision machine. It shows the growth of the nation's strength.

TBZ: "The" answers the question "which nation?" If "nation" is specific, as it is here (China), then you have to use "the." If "any nation" is OK, then use "a." At least, that's the rule in general!

3. 10th year anniversary

ZS: The word "anniversary" contains the meaning of year. So, we just say: 10th anniversary. If we say 10th year anniversary, it is like drawing a snake by adding four feet.

TBZ: This is a translation, similar to "Beijing City" or "Liaoning Province." In English, you don't need to add "city" or "province," just as in the example with "year."

4. Under 6-year-old

ZS: In modern English, people are increasingly liable to use "6-year-old" as a noun. For instance, some say, Buses are prepared to carry the 6-year-olds to school every morning. The 60-year-olds enjoy free bus rides as a community benefit in the city. However, in the case of the sample sentence, I don't think it is right to use it as a noun. Idiomatically it is right to say: Kids under the age of 6 will be vaccinated against the flu. Or, The 6-year-olds will be vaccinated against flu. Because "6-year-old" denotes a person, how can you say something is under that?

TBZ: I agree with Professor Zhu when the expression denotes a person. However, when "6-year-old" denotes something other than a person, such as a law, a ruling, a freeze or a ban, you need to add an article: either "a" (if speaking in general) or "the" (if speaking specifically). For example: The two suspects have been charged under a 6-year-old law.

Chinglish on the way

This column aims to identify Chinglish in public areas. If you see any Chinglish signs, please send a picture of it to wangyu2008@ynet.com together with your name and address.

Mineral Water, Beverage Please Sip into

By Terry Boyd-Zhang

The first three characters on this sign do say mineral water. *Kuang* means "to mine, ore"; *quan* is spring (as in spring water); and *shui* is water.

Yinliao, the next two characters, do mean beverage. A flight attendant may ask you: "Do you want a yinliao or not?" *Qing*, the sixth character, is please. And the next phrase is very useful – *heyikou*, which means: have a drink! It can be used any time you want to convince someone to drink.

The last two characters, *dairu*, mean to bring in. *Dai* means a lot of things, including to take, wear, have, come with, bring (up). *Ru* means "in" or "enter," like *rukou* – entrance.

Have you figured out the whole sign



Photo by Terry Boyd-Zhang

yet? If you have experience with airport security or the Maglev train security in Shanghai, you may have guessed.

This photo was taken by yours truly

at the entrance to the Military Museum. Perhaps you recognized the logo at the top of the sign. Basically, this sign simply means that you may have to drink the flammable explosive you brought. You may have to demonstrate that to security before you are allowed to enter.

Maybe the sign should just be "no drinks allowed in." No one actually checked our water or coffee, but we weren't allowed to eat or drink inside the display room. We had to leave a lighter at security, and did not get it back on the way out.

Nonetheless, I highly recommend the Military Museum, especially for young boys with an interest in weapons.

Due Date

(2010)

Movie of the week

There are two ways to make a comedy: entertain the audience with a bunch of fools or make fools of the audience. *Due Date* may be closer to the later.

Todd Phillips directed *Hangover*, one of the most surprising comedies of 2009, and it has been well received by both critics and viewers. That is why many have been looking forward to *Due Date*. Another highlight is Robert Downey Jr., who appears as a comparatively normal person, leaving behind his stupid role of Zach Galifianakis.

Unfortunately, great acting is about all *Due Date* has to brag about. Next time the director's time may be better invested in developing a better story rather than seasoning his script with bad jokes.

Synopsis

Architect Peter Highman must get to Los Angeles in five days for the birth of his first born. His luggage and wallet end up making the trip without him thanks to Ethan Tremblay, a pathetic actor who gets Peter onto the government's "no-fly" list.

Desperate to get home, he is forced to accept an offer from Ethan to share a ride across the country. The trip quickly becomes the most terrifying and agonizing journey of Peter's life.

Scene 1

(Ethan gets Peter kicked off his airplane before takeoff. When Peter tries to rent a car to drive back to Los Angeles, he learns his wallet was lost on the airplane.)

Peter (P): You got my stuff?

Ethan (E): I grabbed it before they zip-tied me.

P: Rally Monkey? You get my wallet?

E: I didn't see it.

P: Where's my bag?

E: I saw your bag, but I didn't grab it because my hands were full. You know, I had this thing in my hand. What kind of car did you get?

P: I didn't, because I don't have a license because it's in my wallet that's on the ... Right?

E: Oh, shoot. What a **bummer** (1).

P: Yeah, bummer. Thanks for the doll. F—king idiot.

E: Hey, you wanna ride with us?

P: No, I'm fine. I'm not really a big dog person.

E: Look, I know we **got off on the wrong foot** (2), but I have a really great personality once you get to know me.

P: Yeah, I'm sure you do.

E: I got 90 friends on Facebook. Twelve pending, but I got 90 friends. I'll cover expenses. You can pay me back when we get to Hollywood.

P: LA.

E: Huh?

P: It's not called Hollywood. It's Los Angeles.

E: Yeah, but I'm going to Hollywood. What's your name?

P: Peter.

E: My name's Ethan. Ethan Tremblay. And this little guy ... (Ethan holds his dog) This is Sonny. And we would be honored to have you ride with us. Come on. It'll be fun.



Scene 2

(On the first evening of their trip, Peter and Ethan stop at a motel.)

P: Hey, Hollywood. Card's been declined.

E: What's that?

P: Your card? It's no good.

E: Oh, gosh.

P: It's OK.

E: You know what? I bet I **tapped it out** (3) when I rented this car.

P: Great. We'll pay cash. How much you got?

E: Sixty bucks.

P: You have 60 bucks entirely?

E: Yes.

P: How much did you spend on marijuana? On your medicine?

E: I don't know, around 200 bucks.

P: Two hundred bucks?

E: Yeah.

P: Sixty bucks for gas, food, lodging, everything?

E: She's the only dealer in town. She names her price.

P: What were you thinking when you spent



almost all of our money on drugs?

E: I don't think in those terms.

P: What terms do you think in?

E: I'm not an accountant. I'm not even Jewish.

P: Are you an adult?

E: Of course I'm an adult. I'm 23 years old.

P: You are the most **shot-out** (4) 23-year-old I've ever seen. How have you made it? How have you not run yourself over with a car?

E: I've done that.

P: How have you survived? That's my question.

E: Mostly luck.

P: Yeah. That's what I thought. Just dumb f—king luck. We're screwed, Ethan.

E: How so?

P: You spent all our money on weed!

E: It's just another speed bump.

P: You know what? I'm gonna call my wife. She's gonna wire me money. That's it.

E: She can't. You don't have an ID.

P: She'll wire it to you. See? That's an adult solving a problem.



Scene 3

(Ethan falls asleep while driving, causing a near-fatal accident.)

P: Stay away from me.

E: Jeez Louise, are you OK?

P: Am I OK? Do I look OK? I have a broken arm, three cracked ribs. I have seven stitches in my armpit. Does that answer your question? No, not OK.

E: Peter, I am terribly sorry.

P: Are you? Sonny's all banged up. I'm a wreck. You don't have a scratch.

E: Doctor said I was in such a deep sleep I didn't **tense up** (5). I told you I was a deep sleeper.

P: Yeah. Did the doctor say it is not advisable to fall asleep while driving?

E: I was just trying to rest my eyes for a few seconds. But seriously, next time try not to tense up. Really.

(Tony's friend comes to pick him up.)

E: Who's that?

P: My actual friend. He's come to pick me up. All the way from Dallas.

E: Oh, good. Shotgun.

P: Nope. Not us. Just me. We're done. And by the way, it's been a pleasure. But just so my conscience is clear, let me let you know why you're not coming with us, OK? It's not because you got me kicked off a plane and shot by an air marshal. Not because you stood by as I had my ass handed to me by a handicapped hillbilly. I am certainly not leaving you here because you almost got me killed during the most important week of my life. I am leaving you here for a far more fundamental reason: I despise who you are at a cellular level.

E: I've heard that before, and I'm trying to work on it.

P: Great. Now hear this: Beware. I'm warning you, don't go to Hollywood. The streets are not paved with gold. They are paved with the carcasses of imbeciles like you who think they're gonna make it. "Pray you, avoid it." Did you get that? That was Shakespeare. Heard of him?

E: Yes, I've heard of him. He's a famous pirate. And by the way, it's Shakes Beard.

P: Let me give you a little bit of friendly advice. Nobody who calls themselves "Hollywood" has ever made it in Hollywood.

Vocabulary

- bummer:** Slang for a feeling of disappointment or frustration
- to get off on the wrong foot:** to have a bad start to a relationship
- tap out:** to run out of
- shot-out:** clueless or naive
- tense up:** become tense

(By Wang Yu)